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Low Income Employment in Dhaka: Women's Lives, Agency and Identity

Bethany Jennings

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work
The University of Edinburgh
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Statement of Authorship

I, Bethany Jennings, confirm that this thesis presented has:

- i) been composed entirely by myself,
- ii) been solely the result of my own work,
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Abstract

Over the past thirty-five years, an increasing number of women have been working outside their homes in Bangladesh, particularly in the country's largest city Dhaka. A key factor has been the growing garments industry and rapid urbanisation. Research exploring these demographic changes reveals a complex picture of women's situations. While conditions are often extremely poor and pay is low, new forms of work provide women with opportunities that were otherwise rarely available to them and bring them into spaces that were in the past dominated by men. Selling sex demonstrates a form of employment that brings similar dilemmas; while it is often violent and highly stigmatised, women have fought for their right to engage in this type of work. This complex reality is central to the research questions of my PhD study. How do women in these different yet overlapping contexts understand their experiences and manage their identities? Have new employment opportunities and urban living situations fundamentally changed women's positions?

To answer these questions, I spent fourteen months conducting ethnographic research. I began by living in an area with a low-income population and talking with women about their experiences of work. I then met with women who sold sex, visited their homes and places of work. Through observations and in-depth interviews, I was able to explore the spaces women occupied, how they managed their multiple identities and utilised their agency. I found that while there were significant social changes occurring for participants, underlining belief systems saw more gradual change. To accommodate various ideological influences, beliefs were highly complex and often seemed contradictory. I argue that women use the means available to them to manage and improve their situations within significant structural restrictions. Women outside the sex industry maintained their precarious identity as a 'good woman', while pushing boundaries and utilising opportunities. Women who sold sex capitalised on their identity as a 'bad woman' to access services and to be part of activist groups but tried to hide this identity when it was detrimental, which was generally the case. They continued to experience high levels of violence, stigma and social exclusion. In conclusion, I argue that a better understanding of women's responses to social changes and how they manage their positions is essential to work with women to improve the services and policies that affect their lives.

Lay Summary

Over the past thirty-five years, Bangladesh has seen enormous changes, particularly for women. The capital, Dhaka, has grown into a mega city and millions of women have begun to work outside their homes in garments factories. The garments industry has been praised for giving women new work opportunities but also criticised for its poor pay and conditions. There have been similar debates about women who sell sex. While some people view it as a legitimate form of work, others argue that it is harmful for women. I wanted to know how women involved in urban work felt about these issues, how it affected their views of themselves, and whether women's position in society had changed. To find out, I spent fourteen months in Dhaka. For a year, I lived in an area where women had different jobs including in garments factories, domestic work, small businesses, and informal work from home. I got to know these women and their families by visiting their homes and the places of work. I then got to know a group of women who sold sex. I visited their homes and the areas that they worked from. I discussed experiences of work and life with both groups of women, and I recorded some of these discussions.

I found that there were many changes happening for women, but underlying beliefs about women saw more gradual change. They had to constrain their behaviour to be accepted by their communities and to maintain a 'good' reputation. However, many women gained independence because of their work: they did not have to rely on their husband's income and this increased the choices available to them. Even so, there were many negative aspects of their work including low pay, poor conditions, insecurity and mistreatment. Despite restrictions and difficulties, women used the resources available to them to improve their lives and push boundaries. Women who sold sex were able to access some services because of their stigmatised identity and they were more likely to fight for their rights than the first group of women. There were some situations in which women who sold sex were able to hide their identity but they were excluded from most communities and so formed their own communities. They experienced high levels of violence and stigma. I argue that having a better understanding of women's lives can help improve the policies and services that affect their lives.

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Table of Contents

Statement of Authorship	ii
Abstract	iii
Lay Summary	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vii
List of Tables.....	xii
List of Images	xiii
List of Figures	xiv
List of Acronyms	xv
List of Bengali Words.....	xvi
Chapter One:	0
Introduction.....	0
Opening Remarks	0
Bangladesh	2
Social Work	6
Breakdown of Chapters.....	7
Chapter Two:	10
Literature Review.....	10
Introduction	10
Relevant Theoretical Concepts	11
Gendered Spaces and Purdah.....	11
Gendered Labour and Globalisation	13
Sex Work/ Prostitution.....	16
Agency.....	20
Resistance.....	22
Identity	24
Stigmatised Identity	25
Place Identity	26
Social Capital	27
Wellbeing	27
Literature from Bangladesh	29

Gender, Families and Purdah	29
Women's Employment	31
The Garments Industry	33
Other Forms of Urban Low-income Employment for Women.....	35
Selling Sex in Bangladesh	36
Historical Discussion on Prostitution.....	36
Current Situation of Women who Sell Sex in Bangladesh	38
Sex Workers' Movement in Bangladesh	40
Women who Sell Sex in Dhaka.....	42
Sex work and Other Low-income Urban Employment in Dhaka	43
Gaps in Research.....	44
Summary	46
Chapter Three:.....	48
Methodology, Methods and Context	48
Introduction	48
Research Questions.....	48
Methodology.....	50
Ethnographic Research	50
Grounded Theory.....	51
Social Work Research.....	53
Theoretical Influences	54
Post-Colonial Theory.....	54
Feminist Research	55
Field sites, Access, and Participants	57
First Group of Participants and Research Site	59
Second Group of Participants and Research Sites	62
Data Collection Methods	64
Participant Observation.....	65
Recorded Interviews	66
Transcription and Translation	68
Analysis.....	69
Ethics	70
Reflexivity.....	73
Summary	75

Chapter Four:	77
Women and their Communities.....	77
Introduction	77
Women in Low Income Employment	78
Communities and Identity.....	78
Community Response to Status and Power.....	82
Belonging and Protection	85
Community Care.....	85
Protection from Violence.....	87
Community Control and Managing Perceptions	90
Women who Sell Sex	92
Communities and Identity.....	92
Stigmatised Identity	94
Belonging and Resistance	98
The Role of NGOs	98
Fighting for Rights	100
Summary	101
Chapter Five:	103
Women and their Employment.....	103
Introduction	103
Overview of Women's Employment	104
Women in Low Income Employment	105
Types and Places of Work	105
Inside Work.....	105
Outside Work.....	108
Employment Abroad	109
Choices Regarding Employment.....	111
Experiences and Perceptions of Employment.....	115
Necessary Hardship	115
Instability.....	116
Violence and Abuse Experienced through Work.....	117
Empowerment through Employment.....	118
Women who Sell Sex	119
Places of Work.....	119

Work Abroad	121
Choices Regarding Work	122
Violence and Abuse	125
Advocacy, Purpose, and Opportunities	126
Summary	127
Chapter Six:.....	129
Women and their Families	129
Introduction	129
Women in Low Income Employment	130
Marriage.....	130
The Good Husband	132
The Bad Husband.....	133
Managing Polygamy	137
Domestic Violence	140
Relationships Outside Marriage	141
Aspirations for Children.....	145
Wider Family	147
Women who Sold Sex	149
Marriage.....	149
Children	151
Wider Family	153
Summary	154
Chapter Seven:.....	156
Space, Identity and Agency:	156
Continuity and Change	156
Introduction	156
Comparing Participants	158
Space	160
Women and Purdah	160
The Burqa	162
Digital Spaces	162
Work Spaces.....	163
Identity.....	165
Social Status	165

Place Identity	167
Moral Identity	167
Spoilt Identities.....	169
Agency	170
Choices Regarding Work	170
Agency and Exploitation	172
Ideologies and Belief Systems	174
Resistance and Conformity	176
Conformity and Coping Techniques	177
Forms of Resistance.....	179
Summary	180
Chapter Eight:.....	182
Conclusion	182
Overview of Findings.....	182
Reflections on my Research	184
Contribution to Social Science Knowledge	186
Contribution to Research.....	188
Contribution to Policy and Practice.....	188
Limitations of the Study	192
Implications for Further Research	192
Closing Remarks	194
Bibliography	195
Appendix 1: Approved Ethics Review Form.....	206

List of Tables

Table 1: Number of research participants

Table 2: Number of audio recorded interviews

Table 3: Types of work participants had participated in

Table 4: Marriage status of participants (First group)

Table 5: Marriage status of participants (Second group)

List of Images

Image 1: My housing in research area

Image 2: Housing in research area opposite my home

Image 3: Research neighbourhood

Image 4: Research neighbourhood during flooding

Image 5: Squash grown on a home

Image 6: Girl working on sari

Image 7: Work on a sari

Image 8: Neighbourhood shop

Image 9: Shah Ali Mazar

Image 10: Kamalapur railway station

List of Figures

Figure 1: Map of Bangladesh

Figure 2: Venn diagram illustrating similarities and differences of participants' experiences

Figure 3: Diagram illustrating multiple levels of participants' identities

Figure 4: Flowchart illustrating reasons participants gave for engaging in urban work

Figure 5: Diagram illustrating women's responses to their social positions

List of Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BNP	Bangladesh National Party
CNG	Auto-rickshaw run by compressed natural gas
COYTE	Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics
GMH	Global Mental Health
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MNC	Multi National Company
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organisation

List of Bengali Words

Azaan	Call to prayer
Baba	Father
Bhabi	Sister-in-law (brother's wife)
Bahire kaj	Outside work
Bidesh	Foreign country
Boro lok	Wealthy/ important person
Burqa	Woman's garment that covers body and face (originally a Persian word)
Bosti	Slum
Carrom	Popular board game in South Asia
Cha dokan	Tea stall
Chakri	Formal work
Chula	Stove
Dal	Lentils
Fokir kana	Vagrants' home
Gaali	Abusive language
Gamcha	Thin cloth used to dry body or items
Gali	Lane
Hijira	Transgender communities of South Asia
Huzur	Religious Islamic teacher
Jouma kormi	Sex worker
Kaj	Work
Kanki magi	Insult specifically for women
Kharap	Bad
Koshto	Hardship/ difficulty
Kamese	Tunic
Kantha	Blanket sewed together from old saris
Lungi	Male sorong
Ma	Mother
Mama	Maternal uncle
Mazar	Shrine for a Muslim saint
Namaj	Formal prayers performed five times a day in Islam

Orna	Scarf worn by women
Pitha	Snack/ sweet
Poila boishak	Bengali New Year celebrated on the 14 th April
Potita	Fallen woman
Sari	Women's garment consisting of length of cloth draped around body
Shak	Edible leaf
Shalwa	Baggy trousers worn by women
Tawis	Pendant containing verses from the Quran for protection against evil

Chapter One:

Introduction

Opening Remarks

My husband works in garments making kids' t-shirts, pants, etc. If there is lots of work then he receives 10,000tk (£90.33) every month but if there is less work available then he gets 7200tk (£65). And I work on these saris, per sari (I get) 500tk (£4.51) so if I can do two saris per week then I get 1000tk (£9.02). Then we can survive nicely. After paying rent and tutor's fee for my daughter's Arabic language classes we can maintain our lives well. We give to our mother and father-in-law. That day I gave a *lungi* (male sarong) to my father-in-law and cloth to my mother-in-law. (Interview transcript)

This quote is taken from an interview with a young woman who participated in my PhD research, which explores the lives of Dhaka's women in low income employment. It encompasses all the areas of life that the participants were most concerned about: their income, marriage, work, children, and wider families. Like women all over the world, participants had to negotiate and manage their work, time, finances, children, and relationships. The particular women who participated in my research were in a place and point of history where there were immense changes occurring for women. Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, has grown at a dramatic rate; from a population of one million in 1971 to fourteen million in 2007 (Schendel 2009). Different forms of work are available for women in this urban environment. Over the past three decades, there have been increasing numbers of women working outside their homes in garments factories. These women worked for companies which have made enormous profits from their cheap labour. Although women have sold sex in Bangladesh for centuries, they are now doing so in a megacity, where women's lives are changing, and many women are leaving their homes to work.

From my experience as a social worker working with marginalised women, I was interested in how the significant demographic changes occurring in Dhaka were affecting women in low income employment. I had worked with women who sold sex and wondered whether the changes happening more broadly for women had altered their lives. From my professional concern, I found that there was a lack of research in this area and I was interested in understanding these women's lives in much more depth. I therefore chose to embark on my PhD journey. Engagement with the literature led me to the following main research question and sub-questions:

How do women who work in low income employment and/ or sell sex in Dhaka construct and negotiate their identities and understand their experiences in the social context of urbanisation and the changing role of women?

- How do women understand their personal experiences of employment and negotiate their multiple identities?
- What are women's views on the selling of sex?
- How do women interact with and how are they perceived by the communities in which they live and work?
- How have wider demographic, societal, and cultural changes for urban women affected the situation of women selling sex?

I sought to answer these questions through conducting ethnographic research in Dhaka for fourteen months. I first lived in an area where there were a high number of women in low income employment and then got to know a group of women who sold sex. I found that all participants used work as one of many strategies to manage their lives and identities. Although most circumstances were completely out of women's control, they created small and yet significant spaces to carve out elements of their own stories. Employment was just one aspect of their lives, part of a complex web of needs, opportunities, limitations, and desires. Gender, social class, politics, international trade, families, communities, and individual preferences all affected their experiences and identities. Their working lives must be understood in the context of these dense social networks and structures.

Women's situations, beliefs and experiences often seemed contradictory. Communities and religious ideology that restricted women's behaviour also offered them a sense of belonging, protection and meaning to their lives. The forms of work that women engaged in were characterised by poor wages, insecurity and often abuse. Even so, many women said that they enjoyed their work and they appreciated having their own income and the option to be independent. Women who sold sex regularly experienced violence and faced extreme stigma. However, they continued to sell sex, and some fought for their right to do so. All women used work as a safety net when other aspects of their lives, such as their marriages, failed them. Women held on to notions of ideal families as being ones in which their husbands would provide for them and their children, similar to the one described in the opening quotation. However, women were equally pushing boundaries and challenging social norms. Employment was one of many strategies that they used to manage their lives and improve the situations of themselves and their children.

In this thesis, I give an in depth account of women's lives in urban Bangladesh. I found that while participants' decisions and living situations were extremely limited, they used various strategies to negotiate their positions and to increase their wellbeing. These strategies included managing their identities and using them for their advantage, drawing support from their communities and families and engaging in employment. The greater access women had to these resources, the more content they were likely to feel with their lives. However, this often meant restricting behaviour to maintain some of these resources. For example, women were less likely to choose employment outside their home if they had a supportive husband and sex workers had greater mobility in certain spaces because they were less concerned about their reputation. Therefore, I argue that all these aspects of women's lives must be understood and considered when designing services and policies to meet women's needs. A woman is less likely to be interested in 'empowerment' strategies if she feels that these will isolate her from her family or community from whom she draws support. Women experienced exploitative and abusive situations that they skilfully navigated by both limiting and broadening the spaces they occupied, utilising and hiding their identities, and restricting behaviours and pushing boundaries. In all areas of their lives, agency and exploitation coexisted as intrinsic parts of women's experiences. Both should be understood in order to gain a complete picture of women's lives.

In order to understand the lives and experiences of my research participants, the history, geography, and politics of their nation must be understood. In the following section I place my research in context by providing an overview of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh

According to the World Bank (2018a), the population of Bangladesh was 162 million in 2017, making it the world's eighth most populous nation. The prominent language of the country, Bengali, is the sixth most widely spoken language as a mother tongue in the world (Guhaṭhākura and Schendel 2013). As shown on the map (figure 1), India surrounds Bangladesh with the southern eastern tip bordering Myanmar. The melting snow of the Himalayas forms rivers, which flow through the lowlands and meet the sea at the Bay of Bengal. Bangladesh is situated in this delta with its mighty rivers, the Ganges and Brahmaputra (Schendel 2009). Most of the landscape is flat and covered in rice fields. The only high land is in the northern border areas and the Chittagong Hill Tracts of the southeast. Every summer

there are months of heavy rain causing 20% of the country to be submerged in water (ibid). This is both beneficial and detrimental for the land, contributing to Bangladesh having some of the most fertile land in the world, but periodically causing widespread destruction. Throughout the region's history, its rich fertile land has attracted people and trade to the area. However, during the partition of India in 1947, for the first time in its history, the land was enclosed by international borders changing the course of this historically affluent region (Schendel 2009). Bangladesh is today one of the most densely populated countries in the world (Riaz and Sajjadur Rahman 2016).



Figure 1: Map of Bangladesh¹

The area of land that we now call Bangladesh has a long history of outside rule and a short history of being an independent nation. The Mughal Empire took control of the region in 1612 and then British rule was brought in by the East India Company during the eighteenth century

¹Nations Online (2018) Available from: https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/bangladesh_map.htm

(Schendel 2009). When the British left the Indian subcontinent, a hasty and disastrous partition was drawn creating two nations: India and Pakistan. Pakistan was formed to be a Muslim homeland and consisted of two parts: West Pakistan (now Pakistan), and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). They functioned as one country despite being twelve hundred miles apart (Lewis 2011). Partition cut through three provinces, Assam, Bengal, and Punjab, with their numerous trade routes and families. Part of Assam and the largest area of Bengal formed East Pakistan due to their majority Muslim population. The region of Bengal found sixty-four percent of its land and sixty-five percent of its population in East Pakistan (Schendel 2009). Despite its reason for coming into existence, forty-two percent of Bengal's non-Muslim population became citizens of a Muslim nation, making up a fifth of East Pakistan's population (ibid).

East Pakistan was subordinate to and economically exploited by the more powerful West Pakistan. The region of Bengal was proud of its rich language, Bengali, hence West Pakistan's decision to make Urdu the country's national language caused widespread anger in East Pakistan. The elections of 1970 resulted in the main political party of East Pakistan, the Awami League, winning a majority due to its larger population. West Pakistan's response was a violent military clampdown with a million people reportedly killed in systematic genocide (Lewis 2011). During the conflict, women were raped and tortured on a mass scale (Saikia 2011). This was met by armed resistance and a refugee crisis with thousands of people fleeing to India. In response, India joined the military efforts of East Pakistan. Following a nine-month independence war, Bangladesh was born on the 16th December 1971. The trauma of the liberation war has been long lasting and Bangladesh's politics have continued to be turbulent.

In 1974, just three years after independence, Bangladesh suffered a catastrophic famine, which killed 1.5 million people (N. Hossain 2017). The first prime minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujib, who is widely considered the father of the nation, was assassinated with most of his family in 1975. Military dictatorships followed for the next fifteen years, first with Ziaur Rahman who was assassinated in 1981 and then Hussain Muhammed Ershad who was peacefully overthrown by popular demand (Schendel 2009). Democracy was restored in 1991 and two parties have dominated politics since. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Ziaur Rahman's widow, Khaleda Zia, are conservative nationalists with links to Islamist parties. The Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujib's daughter, Sheikh Hasina, is a more secular party with links to

India (Lewis 2011). Apart from a two-year period, from 2007 to 2008, in which there was a military-backed caretaker government, one of these two parties has been in power since 1991. Currently Awami League is in government.

Bangladesh has an extensive history of nongovernmental organisations (NGO) providing services in the region well before it became an independent nation (Lewis 2011). Since its independence, it has become well known for its prominent and far-reaching development NGOs. The two largest, Grameen Bank and BRAC, have gained extensive international attention. While these organisations have had significant outside influences, they are indigenous to Bangladesh. The founder of Grameen Bank, Mohammad Yunus, received a Noble Peace Prize and his microfinance model has been replicated around the world. BRAC has become an international organisation, transporting its programmes to a number of different countries including Afghanistan and the Philippines. There are thousands of NGOs operating in Bangladesh, ranging from small-scale organisations to large-scale institutions with multimillion dollar budgets rivalling those of government departments. Supporters of NGO interventions hail them as vital contributors to the reduction of poverty and point to the achievements of development goals as evidence of their effectiveness. Their critics claim that these organisations weaken the State's ability and responsibility to meet the needs of their citizens (Lewis 2011).

Bangladesh's development has been called a paradox. While it has made significant advances in many areas such as health and education, the country has persistently high levels of poverty and inequality (A. M. R. Chowdhury et al. 2013). Furthermore, it has successfully met several human development goals despite instable and corrupt governments (N. Hossain 2017). Interventions such as the widespread use of community health workers have been attributed to lowering infant and maternal mortality rates more successfully than neighbouring countries (A. M. R. Chowdhury et al. 2013). Similar achievements have been realised in the use of birth control and immunisations. There has been a high level of school enrolment, particularly for girls, which is greater than for boys (Blunch and Das 2015). Most interventions in education, health work and microcredit have focused their efforts on the engagement of women. While many have been viewed as a success, women continue to face high levels of violence and harassment. Bangladesh thus boasts of great successes and yet at the same time, we can see has continued to fail to address many of the needs of its citizens.

Social Work

The methodology of my research and many of the subjects covered in this thesis are relevant to a number of disciplines, including sociology and social anthropology. However, this is a social work PhD thesis because of its relationship to the profession. I am a social worker and was initially interested in my research topic due to my professional experiences. I utilised social work skills throughout the process and I explore its relevance to practice. Social work is an incredibly diverse profession but has common features such as its aim to address similar social 'problems' and adhere to shared values. However, it can only be effective when guided by local knowledge and is contextualised (Cox and Pawar 2006). These principles are reflected in the global definition of social work,

Social Work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. (IFSW 2014)

My research directly relates to the global definition of social work. I hope that it, through providing a better understanding of participants, will assist services and activists to promote more effectively "social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people". There are concerns regarding a blanket approach to social work, and it is recognised that knowledge of context and respect for cultural diversity are central to effective practice (Cox and Pawar 2006). Through taking an ethnographic approach to my research, my thesis highlights localised knowledge and engages with people adhering to the following part of the definition: "Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing". Local knowledge of social problems can be enhanced by broader theoretical concepts such as sociological understandings of individuals' relationships to social structures (Nissen 2014). I have therefore identified broader theories relevant to my research such as agency, identity, and stigma, and used them to gain a more comprehensive understanding of women's lives. In short, I have completed a piece of research to enhance the knowledge of marginalised groups of women in order to better equip social work practitioners.

Although my research is set in one country, it addresses issues such as globalisation and activism that connect with global movements, making it relevant to international social work (Tripodi 2007). Social work has a long history of exchanging ideas and practises across borders with both positive and negative effects (Dominelli 2014). In fact, the first official social work course in Bangladesh, while East Pakistan, was designed with input from the UN (Sultana 2011). This has attempted to professionalise social work in Bangladesh but has not sufficiently taken the local context into account. Historically, there have been a number of harmful social work interventions that have exploited indigenous groups of people and have promoted the notion of the Global North's superiority (Dominelli 2014). However, when equality and empowerment are valued, and local cultures are respected, internationalising practices can be beneficial for marginalised groups of people (ibid).

NGO workers in Bangladesh often call themselves social workers, but only a handful of universities offer degrees in social work (Sultana 2011). Consequently, it has not been developed into its own distinctive profession. However, this does not translate to an absence of social work activities. A number of NGO interventions fit under its broad definition and NGOs play the greatest role in providing the country's social and welfare services (ibid). Social work activities that are relevant to my research include services run by NGOs for sex workers (Sabet and Ahmad 2012) and activist groups that are heavily involved in fighting for garments workers' rights (Kabeer 2000). Interventions are provided for these groups because of the stigma and exploitation that many sex workers face (Alam and Faiz 2012), and the poor conditions and exploitation experienced by women in low-income employment (Absar 2002; Choudhury 2013; Ward et al. 2004). Furthermore, many NGOs in Bangladesh share social work's concern for the status of women and run services that are designed to empower them, including human rights interventions and microfinance programmes (Sultana 2011).

The context of Bangladesh and the importance for social work are central to my thesis and are relevant to each part of it. I will now summarise each of the chapters of my thesis.

Breakdown of Chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction: This chapter provides an overview of the thesis, describes Bangladesh as the context of the research and explores its relationship to social work research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: This chapter provides an overview of the literature that informed my research. It is divided into two sections. The first looks at relevant theoretical concepts and the second explores research in Bangladesh. These theories and pieces of research provide a background to understanding my data and the wider context in which I place my research.

Chapter 3: Methodology, Methods and Context: In this chapter I describe the methodology and methods used for my research. I explain why taking an ethnographic approach was appropriate to answer my research questions. I describe the context of the research sites where my participant observations and interviews took place. I explain each of the steps of the research and provide a justification for them.

Chapter 4: Women and their Communities: In this chapter, I describe the communities that participants were part of and how they identified with them. All the participants identified themselves as being part of poor communities. The first group of participants found protection and belonging in the community of their geographical area, but this meant that they had to restrict their behaviour to remain part of it. The second group, made up of women who sold sex, formed their own communities due to their stigmatised identities. The stigma they faced from wider communities had a significant influence on their lives, restricting who they could interact with.

Chapter 5: Women and their Work: In this chapter, I describe how participants experienced their work and employment. Work was highly gendered and took place within exploitative structures. This was particularly true for women who sold sex who saw violence and abuse as an inevitable part of their work experience. However, all participants used their work as a strategy to manage their situations and increase their independence.

Chapter 6: Women and their Families: In this chapter, I describe participants' relationships with their families. All participants held on to ideal perceptions of family structures but in reality, most did not meet these ideals. Urban situations had changed family structures. For women in general employment, they did not live with their in-laws and could access work that allowed them to live independently from their husbands. Women who sold sex were often estranged

from their families because of their stigmatised identities. However, they were able to hide this identity from family in their village homes. Both groups of women had aspirations for their children to be educated, obtain good jobs and have successful marriages.

Chapter 7: Space, Identity and Agency: Continuity and Change: In this chapter, I discuss three themes that emerged in my study: space, agency, and identity. The two groups of participants shared many experiences, but in general women who sold sex faced the extremes of other women's experiences. They occupied highly stigmatised spaces and held the identity of 'bad' women. Although many women who sold sex upheld their right to sell sex and viewed their occupation as not placing them at fault, they identified their community as 'bad'. While other participants pushed boundaries, they were able to hold on to their 'good' identity. In all situations women were in disadvantaged positions but utilised their agency to manage them. They used the resources available to them as strategies to increase their and their children's wellbeing. This often involved restricting their movement and behaviour in order to avoid negative reactions. However, women were negotiating their positions, pushing boundaries and were agents of incremental changes.

Chapter 8: Conclusion: This chapter provides an overview of the thesis's findings through referring back to the original research questions. I then reflect on the research process. I discuss its contribution to social science knowledge, to research and to policy and practice. I reflect on its limitations and implications for further research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

My research was shaped and formed by existing theoretical concepts and research. In this chapter, I present an overview of the literature related to these concepts and previous studies that guided my research. The texts explored provide background and context to my research questions, methodology and analysis. When looking for relevant literature, I searched the University of Edinburgh library database using key words, followed references in texts, obtained reports from NGOs and took recommendations from my supervisors and colleagues. I include literature that I read during all the different stages of my research process. Before I began the data collection phase, I reviewed relevant books and articles to ground my knowledge in a comprehensive understanding of the issues that I anticipated would affect participants' lives. As I undertook the data collection phase of the research and sought to understand it, I returned to this literature and searched for new texts to give me a more in-depth and theoretical understanding of what I was learning from my data.

This chapter is divided into two sections: the first explores the significant theoretical concepts underpinning my research, and the second explores relevant research specifically related to Bangladesh. The overarching themes that are reflected in both sections are space, identity, and agency. In the first section, I discuss concepts of gendered spaces and *purdah*², globalisation and gendered labour, sex work, agency, resistance, identity, social capital and wellbeing. In the second section, I consider research on Bangladesh regarding gender, family and *purdah*, women's employment, the garments industry, other forms of urban low-income employment and the sex industry. In my discussion of the sex industry, I explore its history, its current situation, activist movements, and sex work in Dhaka.

In the conclusion, I discuss the gaps in the literature that I hope to begin to address through my research. These gaps are: exploring the sale of sex in the wider context of women's work, an in-depth exploration of agency in oppressive conditions and female employees' identities, and ethnographic research on women's work in Dhaka. I argue that it is important for a social work

² The segregation of men and women, explained in the next section

researcher to consider these gaps because it is through gaining a comprehensive understanding of women's lived experiences and their views of their situations that their needs can best be addressed.

Relevant Theoretical Concepts

Gendered Spaces and Purdah

The spaces that individuals occupy are central to providing a sense of belonging (Rose 1995). They become gendered through the day-to-day activities of individuals and communities. Gendered spaces become normalised, viewed as inevitable, and contribute to the preservation of women's lower social status (Spain 1992). Activities that may seem mundane result in the regulation of the spaces that women are allowed to or expected to occupy. Maintaining these gendered spaces reinforces differences in women's access to power, knowledge, and resources (ibid). Banerjee (2017) argues that it is through these spaces that 'patriarchy is produced and reproduced' (23). This happens in many contexts and cultures. *Purdah* is one form of the construction of gendered space.

The definition of *purdah* is the practice of women having limited or no interaction with men outside their immediate families (Papanek and Minault 1982; Rozario 1992). It appears in many different forms: the strictest involves women only leaving their homes fully covered, whereas more common customs follow a looser observation of general separation (Kirmani 2009). While an understanding of *purdah* is important, it is equally essential not to over generalise or to have simplistic views on the practice. Kirmani (2009) argues that in the 1970s, many feminists categorised 'Muslim women' as disadvantaged and voiceless, hidden behind a veil. This contributed to the 'othering' of 'Muslim women', placing them in one single category, ignoring their diversity and agency. In reality *purdah* is practiced and understood in vastly different ways. It is changing and constantly negotiated (ibid).

While *purdah* is mainly associated with Muslim countries, pre-Islamic societies in Persia, Arabia and India practised *purdah*, suggesting its cultural rather than strictly religious roots (E. H. White 1977). The link between Islam and *purdah* has a long history of discussion. The following quotation is from a Muslim writer in the 1930s who argued that the practice of *purdah* was

fundamentally un-Islamic. He states:

Out of the many evils that have crept into the pure and simple teachings of Islam, the seclusion of women seems to have done more harm to Muslims than any other. It is this evil that has resulted in the political stagnation, social misery and educational suicide of the Muslims. It is *purdah* that has kept the better half of Muslims in ignorance and perpetual drudgery. In short it is the root of all evil. No reform is possible unless Muslim women are freed from the clutches of blood-sucking *purdah* for it is they who have to bring up the citizens of tomorrow. What a deliberate violation of the Holy Prophet's command! The man, whose coming to this world was a blessing to women, who was the first to give the highest status to women, who raised the down-trodden female sex to the level of equality with men and who championed the cause of women against the odds, his followers who profess to take pride in him, deny to women fresh open air. (Hamid 1935: 276)

Understandings of *purdah* have continued to be debated (Kirmani 2009; Rozario 1992). While associated with Islam, it is not exclusively practised within it and, as the above quote argues, is not inherent to the religion. It has been practised in strict forms by Hindus of high caste in Northern India (Jeffery 1979). In a country such as Bangladesh, most communities, including Hindu and Christian, follow a general form of *purdah* (Rozario 1992). The issue has continued to be debated among Muslim scholars with various interpretations of the Quranic text (Rozario 1992). Kirmani (2009) asserts that *purdah* is fluid and varied in how it is lived out in different countries, communities, social classes, families, and individuals.

In the 1970s, White (1977) blamed a long list of social problems in Muslim countries, including low rates of literacy, poor health, and female unemployment, on the practises of *purdah*. In the following abstract, she describes her views on it:

Purdah is more than wearing the veil, although that is its most obvious manifestation to the casual observer. It is a complex of customs based on the concept of family honour, and designed to maintain the sexual purity of women. Women are assumed to be vulnerable and unable to protect themselves from their own sensual natures or the sexual advances of other men. Therefore, they must be protected by the harem and the veil from temptation and assault. *Purdah* is an accommodation to and a means of perpetuating the perceived differences between the sexes: the male being self-reliant and aggressive, the female weak, irresponsible, and in need of protection. It has been described as "inequality enshrined in custom". *Purdah* is an extreme manifestation of the moral double standard which requires strict virginity and fidelity of women; female promiscuity is more feared than incest or male homosexuality. (White 1977: 31)

While White's description of *purdah* reveals commonly held attitudes of the time and does not take into account the diverse practices of *purdah*, it does recognise that *purdah* is about more

than women's movement and explains some of the reasons behind it. Maintaining a social order, avoiding shame, and differences between the sexes are the underlining beliefs that form *purdah* (Rozario 1992). Avoiding sexual activity outside marriage maintains a desired social order and women's sexual purity is linked to the honour of the family. Women are viewed as more able to control their desires, yet exist as a temptation to men. Separating the sexes, therefore, is necessary to preserve social order and family honour (ibid).

Purdah is a highly complex issue. While it is generally agreed to place women at a disadvantage, research has also highlighted that wealthy women have used *purdah* for their own advantage. In the late 1970s Jeffrey (1979) explored how women in Delhi held power through maintaining its practice. Women had information that men could not access and had the ability to disrupt the worlds of men. For example, women were relied upon when making decisions regarding marriage arrangements because they had access to information that was hidden from men through *purdah*. Generally, it is only the wealthy who can uphold the strictest forms of *purdah* as additional quarters are necessary (Papanek and Minault 1982). Furthermore, families who need the additional income generated by women have little choice in maintaining *purdah* though many state that they would choose to if they had the means (Jeffery 1979; Rozario 1992).

A more recent study explores a group of women's different motivations, understandings, and experiences of *purdah*. Kirmani (2009) conducted research with Muslim women in North India. She describes a participant who maintained the strictest form of *purdah*. She was linked to *Jamaate Islami*, a particularly conservative Islamic political organisation, and described herself as the 'black sheep' of her family. For her, following a strict form of *purdah* was an act of defiance and way of asserting her personal political and religious beliefs. Some of Kirmani's other participants described *purdah* as a form of protection and freedom, others saw it as a personal form of worship that could be maintained in a loose form, while others viewed it as a restrictive practice that held women at a disadvantage. Kirmani's research illustrates the diversity and multiple influences of beliefs on how women view and live out *purdah*. An area of women's lives that is significantly affected by *purdah* is their participation in the labour market.

Gendered Labour and Globalisation

Although women have always worked both in and outside the home, classical western social

theorists had little to say about gender and labour, often holding prejudiced assumptions about women's abilities and roles (Grint and Nixon 2015). Unsurprisingly, these theorists were male and predominately concentrated on the study of men in society. Consequently, historical and sociological accounts of work and labour have focused on the experiences of men (Boydston 1994). Ann Oakley's ground-breaking work in the 1970s examined housework and challenged the sexist ways in which it had been viewed. She argued that domestic work had been ignored as a form of labour and women's experiences of this form of work were characterised by gender inequalities (Oakley 1974, 1972). Academic writers have continued to challenge the dominant, male accounts of work.

However, work continues to be structured according to gendered norms. Gender is both enforced and recreated through forms of work (Weeks 2011). Across the world there continues to be clear inequality experienced by women through their work in a variety of ways including their pay, positions, and conditions (Grint and Nixon, 2015). Patriarchy shapes experiences of work, holding women in a subordinate position to men. Despite men and women often working similar hours outside the home, on average women still spend a much greater amount of time doing domestic work and childcare (ibid). The historian Jeanne Boydston (1994) argues that capitalism's emphasis on monetary wages devalued domestic tasks leading to it not being viewed as labour. Elements of patriarchal control structures labour markets, 'thus, there remains a conception of capitalist patriarchy but no one unchanging form of it' (Sen and Sengupta 2016: 145).

Capitalism and globalisation have brought about a high number of young women in the Global South into formal employment through the production of goods for export. Feminists have sought to explain why this work is so gendered as well as to understand the effect that it has on women and their roles in society. Bair (2010) states that 'the qualities most valued in export-processing workers – docility, dexterity and cheapness – turned out to be, in countries as diverse as Mexico and Malaysia, associated with the same population: young women' (211). In-depth ethnographic research carried out by Lynch (2007) in Sri Lanka on garment factory workers confirms this view. Managers of factories told her that they specifically employed women because they are viewed as physically best suited to the detailed work involved and perceived as more patient and obedient than male workers.

Goodman (2013) argues that capitalism both 'needs and creates gender roles' (5) because capitalism benefits from insecure, part-time and informal work that is predominately carried out by women. Goodman uses the example of one of the earliest studies of women's work in the context of globalisation, carried out by Mies (1982), which looked at women who were employed by the lace making export industry in India. Most of these women worked from home, their wages were under subsistence levels and they remained living in their traditional family situations. Mies argued that the global trade was a continuation of the patriarchal system. Their status did not change and was actually compounded by their work situations. Mies' contemporary, Fernandez-Kelly, focused on women who worked in factories in Mexico. Although these women were not working at home, she found that the factory managers and owners maintained women workers' low status (Fernández-Kelly 2008). It was more than simply a 'reconfiguration' of local patriarchal systems. When these production sites were placed in the Global South, they effectively created a larger patriarchal structure on a global scale. Bair (2010) argues:

While capitalism does not determine the concrete modalities of gender that exist in a given locale, it is essential for explaining the gendered dimension of transnational production as a patterned regularity of the contemporary global economy. (205)

It is important to note that there is not a feminist consensus on the impact of capitalism on women's status. Cudd (2015) argues that capitalism brings social innovation, promotes independence and exposes women to new ideologies that challenge harmful ones. These factors result in 'progressive capitalism' being the most effective tool to fight the oppression of women. While Cudd provides valuable arguments regarding capitalism's role in women's access to technology, work, and different ideologies, she assumes that individualism results in an improved situation for women and that 'traditional' beliefs are always negative for women. Furthermore, she dismisses the real experiences of exploitation that women experience and the continued gender inequalities that exist in capitalist societies.

While the wider structural aspects of globalised labour are hugely significant and should not be ignored, it is equally important to consider women's agency. Much of the attention given to globalisation and women's work in garments factories has been characterised by descriptions

of low wages and exploitation. Critics argue that images of the 'third world' victim that is often portrayed is unhelpful and fails to tell the whole story (Banerjee Saxena 2014; Kabeer 2000).

Simply highlighting their problems, and ignoring their gains, erases the possibility that there may have been a calculus of choice involved and that women may consider these jobs worth defending. (Kabeer 2004: 21)

The majority of women in paid employment globally are in the informal sector, where the positive benefits female work offers has the lowest impact (Kabeer, Milward, and Sudarshan 2013). Most traditional trade unions have failed to represent women, particularly women in the informal sector. Organising and obtaining rights for these groups are particularly difficult. However, globalisation has brought about new opportunities for grassroots organisations to connect with the state and international communities, with several successful rights-based movements around the world (ibid). The sale of sex is a form of informal work that is highly contested and that has been given a lot of attention by researchers and practitioners alike.

Sex Work/ Prostitution

Much of the discussion on the sale of sex has taken place among feminists in the Global North and concerns a very different setting from my research. However, it is important to review the debate in order to put my research into the wider context of academic understandings of the subject. For much of the 19th Century in the UK and USA, there was public concern regarding prostitution (Cree 2008). The current debate reflects this history and, simply put, falls into two camps: the abolitionists who believe that selling sex is fundamentally oppressive, referring to the purchasing of sex as prostitution, and those who view sex work as a form of personal service. The term 'abolitionist' alludes to the 19th century movement to abolish slavery and many of those involved in fighting slavery took on the new challenge of fighting prostitution. This terminology is still used in current debates and has been extended by more recent portrayal of sex trafficking as a form of 'modern slavery' (ibid).

Barry (1984) and Jeffrey (1997), who identify as part of the abolitionist movement, argue that sex work exists because of women's subordinate position in society and that it is inherently violent. For these reasons, they conclude that it cannot be considered work and refer to women who sell sex as women in prostitution (Barry 1995, 1984; Jeffreys 1997). Coming from a socialist/ Marxist feminist viewpoint, Overall (1992) argues in her article 'What's wrong with prostitution?'

that although sex work is not inherently violent, it should be abolished because it is tied up in patriarchy and capitalism. She argues that it exists for men's benefit and for women to serve men and that accepting prostitution as work contributes to wider inequalities within society. Abolitionists draw from a wealth of studies that illustrate the exploitation and violence that is prevalent in many women's experiences, both within the sex industry itself and from many of women's childhoods, which arguably cause women to be more vulnerable to exploitation (Hunter 1993; Silbert and Pines 1982; Waltman 2011). Research conducted with 854 individuals in the sex industry across nine countries on four continents found that sixty-three percent of the participants had been sexually abused as children, seventy-one percent suffered physical assault during work and seventy-five percent had experienced homelessness (Farley 2004). The abolitionists would argue that this study, and other similar findings from research, illustrate that prostitution is characterised by abuse, violence, and vulnerability, proving that it is fundamentally exploitative (Waltman 2011).

In contrast, other groups define selling sex as a form of work and therefore use the term sex worker. The first sex workers' rights organisation, named Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYTE), began in San Francisco in the 1970s. Its purpose was to raise awareness on issues of sex work, normalise sex workers' experiences and decriminalise sex work (Weizer 1991). As similar organisations emerged throughout the world, academics and researchers took up the cause. For example, Zatz (1997) responded to the abolitionists' arguments by pointing out the diversity of sex workers' experiences and that a single theory cannot claim to represent all sex workers. Furthermore, she argues that the cause of the problems associated with sex work is its illegal status, including the violence many women experience. The argument follows that if sex work was made legal and given the same rights as other forms of employment, the difficulties that are associated with it would no longer apply. Kempadoo and Doezema (1998), in agreement with Zatz's argument, add that the abolitionists' view contributes to sex workers' stigmatisation because it ignores their agency. Similarly, Comte (2014) points out that there have been many studies identifying women who choose sex work and feel empowered by it, disproving that sex work is inherently oppressive. Comte highlights the fact that male experiences of sex work are commonly excluded from the debate. She suggests that research on male sex workers show that they face similar issues to female sex workers and this challenges the view that sex work is fundamentally the oppression of women by men.

Interestingly, two countries that have taken a lead on the issue of sex work/ prostitution have done so in opposite ways. In 2003, New Zealand decriminalised sex work arguing that sex work is a job and should be treated like any other form of work (Warnock and Wheen 2012), and in 1999, Sweden made buying sex illegal as this was argued to be an abuse of women (Waltman 2011). Both countries claimed that the motivation for changing their laws was the interests of women and both were supported by organisations that work for the rights of women in the sex industry (Waltman 2011; Warnock and Wheen 2012). The Swedish and New Zealand policy models have been both praised and criticised by those on opposing sides of the debate. Waltman (2011) argues that prostitution has been greatly reduced in Sweden because of the government's hard line on the issue. However, others claim that the industry has become more hidden and conditions have worsened for those who remain within it (Scoular 2010). Some research studies have found that since the decriminalisation of sex work in New Zealand, the number of sex workers has remained static and that they have been able to take significant measures to protect themselves (Warnock and Wheen, 2012). However, its critics argue that the harm caused by prostitution has not been reduced by the legalisation or decriminalisation. Instead, research has found that violence continued to be widespread in the sex industry and sex workers felt that the law could do little to address this (Waltman, 2011).

While there has been a preoccupation with legislation regarding sex work/ prostitution, this may not be the primary factor affecting women's day-to-day lived experience. Agustin (2008) argues that regulations are ineffective, because they are attempting to control a population that chiefly operates outside the law. Furthermore, legal systems are limited because they ignore local variations of the trade. Scoular (2010) argues that the Netherlands' system of regulating sex work through licensed brothels and the Swedish approach have both resulted in increased marginalisation of street-based sex workers. Abel and Fitzgerald (2012) found that cuts to welfare provisions in New Zealand have had a much more significant effect on women's decision to enter the industry than its decriminalisation. Controversially, Scoular (2010) argues that advocating for one legal model or another is potentially harmful, because the local context is essential to understanding the most appropriate response to each circumstance, which is hugely diverse for each situation.

Vicente (2016) claims that none of the governments' systems have prevented women in the industry experiencing harm because they are based on two positions that are wrong: the liberal feminist views of normalization and decriminalisation or the radical feminist views of abolition or prohibition. He argues that these positions do not take into account the very different ways individuals experience sex. While some are happy to have sex with a stranger, others are deeply traumatised by the experience. These individual experiences of sex cannot be addressed by normalization, nor is it fair to prohibit those who are not harmed by the experience.

It is all too easy for people to get into prostitution against their genuine will; they may need the money simply to survive or to pay off debts, or they may be coerced in some way. However, the experience can certainly be devastating. The ideal state, I submit, is one in which only those people who will not be harmed as a result of practising prostitution become prostitutes. This ideal state cannot be achieved by normalization, but it can by vigilance; and vigilance does not compromise anybody's rights: customers and prostitutes who have no problem in exchanging sex for money are free to do so. (Vicente 2016: 484)

Vicente says that it is difficult to find another job that has similar effects on the individuals involved and therefore compares the laws around it to those regarding organ donations. Laws recognise donors' rights to give their organs to people that they care about but have restraints to ensure that donors are fully willing, aware of the risks and are psychologically prepared. He also makes comparisons to laws regarding euthanasia. Countries that allow it, put in place mechanisms to ensure that decisions are made without coercion and are well informed. I found Vicente's position helpful in recognising individuals' feelings and beliefs regarding sex, and how this affects whether they experience harm through prostitution. However, it is unclear how laws of 'vigilance' that he proposes would actually be worked out in practice.

My aim is not to concentrate on making an argument for or against the sale of sex, or to take a moral stance on the issue³. Women make choices to sell sex in a range of different situations and for various reasons. I recognise that there is plenty of evidence showing that much of the sex industry is exploitative. Nevertheless, there is a wealth of evidence that many women make considered decisions to sell sex. It is my goal to understand how women make decisions and negotiate their identity within their context. I agree with Sariola (2010) who, based on her research with sex workers in India, argues that it is elitist to concentrate on whether women

³I use the term 'sex worker' when referring to women who used the term themselves or when referring to literature that uses the term.

should or should not sell sex. This debate has little relevance to most women who sell sex, and many will be unaware of it. The fact is that women do sell sex for various reasons and with different levels of agency. However, the complexities and challenges that are reflected in this debate are part of the lived experiences of the participants of my research. A key aspect of these complexities is how they utilise their agency and deal with the limitations on their agency. A discussion on the concept of agency is therefore key to this research.

Agency

Agency can be defined as a person's ability to form intentions and take considered actions, expressed both individually and collectively, and is arguably a characteristic of all human beings (Sewell 1992). However, an individual's agency is confined within social structures and will, therefore, vary greatly according to cultures, times and situations. The focus on agency is not unproblematic as it can be used to place blame on individuals and often ignores structural inequalities, contributing to a neoliberal, individualistic agenda (Wilson, Phillips, and Wilson 2013). Evans (2013) argues that the ideology of the market economy promotes the ideal of the individual being an 'autonomous neoliberal citizen' (48). The idea that people are in control of their destinies and power is in the hands of individuals can distract from wider structural factors that determine status in society. An over concentration on agency may lead to a skewed understanding of individuals' situations, omitting historical context and social relationships (Asad 2000). Furthermore, feminist theory has often defined agency as women taking on a universal view of freedom, which has been criticised for being ethnocentric and ignoring social contexts (Hutchings 2013; Madhok, Phillips, and Wilson 2013). This 'freedom' has been taken from a Eurocentric worldview and assumed to be relevant for the rest of the world. It both exaggerates the freedoms of women from the Global North and ignores the strengths of women in the Global South. Nevertheless, feminists have also used concepts of agency to challenge depictions of women from the Global South as being powerless victims (Hemmings and Kabesh 2013).

It is important to understand how both agency and coercion can exist simultaneously (Madhok et al., 2013). Individuals are not exclusively coerced or agents, and it is problematic not to recognise both experiences;

If we have only one or the other then repudiating patronising images of the oppressed and powerless... requires us to deny, or at least obscure the extent to

which social relations of inequality and domination continue to structure our lives.
(Madhok et al. 2013: 3)

Hutchings (2013) argues that feminist theories must embrace the context of a pluralistic and complex world and, therefore, recognise that women's agency will be expressed in ways that are different from ones that view autonomy as a 'feminist revolutionary subject' (14). Mahmood's (2005) research on religious Muslim women in Egypt explores this position. Many of the women she researched chose to take on restricted gendered roles because of their religious devotion. Mahmood draws on Foucault's ideas, seeing power as part of all relationships and negotiated by individuals in whatever context they are in through their action (Foucault 1976). She argues that Western feminists too often label women who make choices that do not fit into their view of liberation as being socialised into oppression. Mahmood (2005) states that these views dismiss women's agency and demonstrate a lack of understanding of their choices. Liberation theories that romanticise notions of resistance against a dominating power do not take into account the complexities of many women's realities or their cultural and historical contexts. The use of power or agency is not exclusively found in the fight against one dominant force, but instead women take many different actions that should be recognised as agency.

There are various degrees of agency and it continues to be contested. Studies in youth and childhood studies have explored the variability of levels of agency. Bordonaro and Payne (2012) define 'ambiguous agency' as children exercising agency against expected norms such as instances where children participate in warfare. Moral and ethical considerations shape and form our understanding of agency in these types of spaces. The concept of 'thin agency' has been used in studies on child domestic workers (Jensen 2014; Klocker 2007). The researchers found that while children's agency was constrained in these situations, it was not absent. I would argue that these ways of understanding agency are not limited to children. It is essential to understand that agency exists in varying degrees, in morally contested situations, and are always within the confines of historical and social structures. Madhok (2013) argues that agency is too often viewed as synonymous with autonomy, but it can exist outside it. Choices can take place in oppressive situations, involving decisions on what causes least harm or safeguards women's needs. Banerjee (2017), agreeing with Madhok, states, "Agency therefore cannot read as being opposed to difficulties or suffering but rather as what one can and cannot do, or how one can endure within that set of suffering" (28). Madhok and Banerjee view agency as

strategies, claiming that this takes away the baggage of deciding what is 'right' or 'empowering'. These strategies enable women to manage situations that are oppressive in various ways. The concept of agency is essential to the debate on the sale of sex precisely because the individuals involved are often in oppressive contexts with limited choices.

People who promote sex work as work argue that women are utilising their agency by choosing to sell sex. Those arguing against it would point out the wider social contexts that limit women's actual agency to make these choices. However, considering the role of agency should not be limited to exploring whether women choose to enter the sex industry or not. There have been a number of studies that have looked at how sex workers utilise their agency within their working situations (Ham and Gerard 2014; Sanders 2005; Sariola 2010). Sariola (2010) drew from the work of Foucault (1976) and Mahmood (2005) in her ethnographic research with sex workers in India. She found that sex workers utilised their agency within oppressive situations through playing an active role in negotiating their situations to protect their safety and privacy. Ham and Gerard (2014) found in their research in Australia that sex workers made choices to increase their invisibility in order to minimise stigmatisation. Furthermore, they found that experiences of agency and vulnerability were specific to individual situations.

In public discourses around sex work, vulnerability can often calcify into a static characteristic that is easily conflated with particular races or ethnicities. This can disguise the fact that vulnerability is a relationship between agent and a context, so that the same worker can experience different types of vulnerability and agency across different workspaces. (Ham and Gerard 2014: 301)

Through these studies, it becomes apparent that women utilise their agency in a variety of ways and there is a complex relationship between agency and vulnerability or coercion. Identifying women's agency is essential to avoid depicting women who sell sex as helpless (Hemmings and Kabesh 2013), but it is equally important to recognise wider structures of inequalities (Wilson 2013) and social contexts that greatly affect levels of agency and how agency is expressed (Hutchings 2013; Mahmood 2005).

Resistance

Resistance and agency are closely linked subjects: one cannot resist without asserting agency, or as Foucault (1982) argues, resistance is inevitable where there is power. Scott (1985) explored the relationship of 'peasants' in rural Malaysia with power through ethnographic

research. He argues that it may appear that his participants consented to their oppression, but they engaged in 'everyday acts of resistance' through acts such as complaints, slander and non-cooperation. He called these acts the 'weapons of the weak'. Larger scale, visible resistance uprisings are rare and usually unsuccessful. It therefore makes sense for people to engage in more subtle forms of resistance. Powerful groups are not alone in defining histories and experiences.

To be sure, the economic givens are crucial: they define much, but not all, of the situations that human actors face; they place limits on the responses that are possible, imaginable. But those limits are wide and within them, human actors fashion their own responses, their own experience of class, their own history. (Scott 1985:41)

A study of women in North India found similar strategies employed by women in disadvantaged positions. Participants' acts of everyday resistance included refusing to cook, singing vulgar songs and spreading rumours (Jeffery and Jeffery 1996). Hart (1991), with a gendered account of labour relations, argues that individuals do not have a single identity. Women are embedded in the interconnected systems of capitalism and patriarchy. Hart reconceptualises the term 'weapons of the weak', taking into account the complexity of individuals' identities and the role gender plays in limiting the actions of people, both male and female. She concludes, 'gender does indeed entail some degree of mystification and false consciousness' (Hart 1991: 117). She argues that women are often not fully aware of their exploitation and may accept their subordinate position.

Women in informal labour have had to use 'soft power' to assert their rights:

Any strategies they may pursue in order to increase returns to their labour or improve their working conditions have, by necessity, been confined to the traditional 'weapons of the weak': hidden subversions and individual resistance. (Kabeer et al. 2013: 6)

However, there are a number of groups around the world that are organising informal female labourers to take action 'beyond the weapons of the weak'. Globalisation has allowed for local groups to connect to international movements. Often this is slow paced work, using soft power. However, there are successes with resistance movements bringing about changes (Kabeer, Milward, and Sudarshan 2013). Individuals' decision to be involved in resistance or not is closely related to their identity, the groups that they belong to and their relationships with these groups.

Identity

Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. But it is also about your social relationship, your complex involvement with others. (Weekes, 1991: 88)

Identities are at the core of how individuals value themselves and how they feel accepted by others, making this a key contributor to people's well-being (Snow and Anderson 1987). Individuals' identities are produced and constructed through discourses, reflection and practices, in relation to behaviours and attributes that are socially agreed upon as being 'normal' (Goffman 1963; Hall 2000). Central to people's identities are feelings of belonging to a group, which involves emotional attachments (Yuval-Davis 2006). This sense of belonging and association is a powerful way of connecting groups and individuals. In Anderson's (2006) book 'Imagined Communities' on nationalism, he argues that nations are '*imagined*' because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even heard of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (6). This national identity is so powerful that people will fight and die for it. While some individuals or groups will feel a stronger affiliation to their national identity than others, its power demonstrates the emotions that an identity such as nationalism can evoke (Rose 1995).

Yuval-Davis (2006) describes identity in terms of social location, which includes categories such as ethnicity, gender, race, age group, nationality, and profession. All these social locations have implications regarding 'grids of power relations in society' (4). However, they are fluid and take on different meanings depending on location and time in history. Furthermore, some may be markers rather than necessarily pertaining to power. No one has a single identity, and therefore understanding social location through the lenses of intersectionality is vital. Places where people find belonging and situate their identity can change and take on different degrees of importance. However, it can also be forced on people. Yuval-Davis discusses Frantz Fanon's book, *Black Skins, White Masks*, written in 1952 as an example of this. Fanon (2008) wrote about how Black culture was demonised and portrayed as primitive by colonisers. As a response many of these views were internalised and people of African heritage adopted aspects of White culture but were never fully accepted by European society.

Stigmatised Identity

Closely aligned to identity is the topic of 'spoilt' identity and with it, stigma. Goffman (1963) explores the ways stigmatised groups manage their stigma. He identifies different types of stigmatised groups including those who are seen as deviating from behavioural norms such as ex-offenders or sex workers. Stigmatised groups are viewed as having less value in society than others. Goffman (1963) describes how they often take on the negative views of wider society:

Further, the standards he has incorporated from the wider society equip him to be intimately alive to what others see as his failing, inevitably causing him, if only for moments, to agree that he does indeed fall short of what he really ought to be. Shame becomes a central possibility, arising from the individual's perception of one of his own attributes as being a defiling thing to possess, and one he can readily see himself as not possessing. (18)

Goffman (1963) explores how stigmatised individuals employ different methods of managing their stigma and the effect stigma has on their identity. Methods of managing stigma include trying to hide their identity or only revealing it to a few people who are seen as sympathetic. Even when features causing the stigma can be hidden, the fear of being found out is often present and the awareness of societal shortcomings is isolating for many individuals. Koken (2012) conducted a more recent study on stigma with sex workers in the United States. She used Goffman's theories to explore how these women managed their stigma and found that many points still apply today. The research found that women try to hide their identities as sex workers or use what Goffman calls 'information management techniques' only to reveal it to a select few. This often led to social isolation and a negative effect on their emotional health. Furthermore, these sex workers often internalised the negative views of society. Koken (2012) found that the women who did choose to reveal their identities to friends and family had better self-esteem and a more positive view of their identities.

There have been several studies that explore sex workers' identity and illustrate the diversity of people's experiences as well as the fluid nature of their identity. Brewis and Linstead (2000) reviewed qualitative research that looked at both male and female sex workers in Australia and the UK with a particular interest in the construction of their identities. They found that sex workers often attempted to separate their working and personal selves. In this study, most sex workers saw selling sex as an impersonal act. However, there were exceptions of sex workers who reported that they enjoyed having sex while working and/or formed emotional attachments

with clients. Sanders' (2005) ethnographic study with female sex workers in Birmingham found that they capitalised on their sexuality through constructing a specific identity during work for financial gains. In a very different context, Gysels et al. (2002) interviewed thirty-four women who sold sex in Uganda. A significant proportion of these women did not identify themselves as sex workers and described their relationships with 'clients' as being a mixture of economic dependence and emotional attachments.

Women who sell sex may be a particularly stigmatised group. However, there are other forms of work and can also be stigmatising. Lynch (2007) explored the lives of garment factory workers in Sri Lanka where there was stigma attached to young single women working in a factory. Because of this stigma, these workers found it important to identify as 'good girls'. However, their freedom and access to new experiences did fundamentally change their identities. Lynch describes them as being 'Good girl[s] of Sri Lankan modernity' (p.167). They pushed boundaries and saw themselves as more sophisticated than 'village women' but wanted to maintain a respectable identity. Snow and Anderson (1987) researched another stigmatised group, homeless individuals in America, to consider both social and individual identities. Social identities place individuals in relationship to others by location, characteristics and time. Personal identities are meanings placed on individuals by themselves. They found that many homeless individuals would try to distance themselves from their social identity. They were often very critical of other homeless people and separated their personal identity from their social identity as a way of managing the stigma that they faced.

Place Identity

An important aspect of people's identity are the places that they occupy. The importance of *purdah* to women in Bangladesh and connotations of 'streets' to sex workers made me particularly interested in this aspect of identity. However, I found that the literature on the subject moved away from my sociological perspective of identity. I therefore drew on literature from psychology to assist me in my understanding of identity's relationship with 'place'. Places are 'dynamic arenas that are both socially constituted and constitutive of the social' (Dixon and Durrheim 2000). Place identity theorises this relationship between place and identity. Central to people's understanding of and relationships with place is whether or not one belongs. The notion of home is an obvious example of this (ibid). A discursive approach to place identity moves away

from simply understanding people's relationship with their environment as a cognitive exercise and instead views language as creating ideas of space. Discursive constructions of identity and place can both legitimise and reject people's belonging or movement (Kirkwood, Mckinlay, and Mcvittie 2013). Studies taking this approach consistently find that discourse regarding place furthers the moral agenda of groups, for example using blaming, excluding or justifying rhetoric (Hugh-Jones and Madill 2009). While discourse regarding place can be used to exclude, it can also create an empowering identity for those being excluded (Rose 1995).

Social Capital

Social capital is a concept that provides a useful tool for understanding the social networks and resources that individuals or communities have access to and the impact that they have on their lives. Bourdieu (1977) argues that social actors use various strategies to draw on conventions and resources that are available to them for the accumulation of symbolic capital. Symbolic or social capital refers to the support or creation of social relationships and includes social standing or family honour. It directly affects the choices that people are able to make and the power that they can access. There are different types of social capital. Bonding social capital refers to relationships between members of the same network, bridging social capital refers to relationships between different groups, and linking social capital refers to access to formal institutions and authorities (Szreter and Woolcock 2004). A study conducted on families in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina in New Orleans found that individuals initially relied on their bonding social capital with friends and family meeting their immediate needs. However, for long term survival and rebuilding of their communities, bridging and linking social capital was essential (Hawkins and Maurer 2010). Szeter and Woolcock (2004) argue that to achieve a healthy society it is necessary to have a 'balanced distribution of a relatively rich endowment of all three of these forms of social capital' (661). Levels of social capital have a significant impact on the wellbeing of communities and individuals.

Wellbeing

Considering the role of wellbeing is helpful when analysing the lives of individuals and groups, the motivations behind their choices and the effects of social capital. The concept of wellbeing has gained popularity in recent years as a way of looking beyond measures of economic gain towards a more holistic understanding of development (White and Blackmore 2016). White

(2017) argues that the attention given to wellbeing is due to anxiety that has been created by the erosion of relational societies during the development of capitalism. While wellbeing is closely linked to happiness, it is generally viewed as a broader concept. Happiness is commonly defined as a feeling or emotion and is more controversial in policy or academic debates. However, 'wellbeing and happiness form part of the same cultural complex' (White and Blackmore 2016: 6). Different tools are used to measure wellbeing or happiness, but the vast majority define wellbeing individualistically. Although they include the importance of relationships, the focus is on the effect that these relationships have on the individual (White 2017).

White (2017) argues that relational wellbeing is a more appropriate approach. Relational wellbeing is rooted in a relational ontology that begins by considering relationality before the individual rather than the reverse. In her research in India and Zambia, White found that wellbeing was experienced collectively. Participants' sense of wellbeing was inextricably linked to social structures and their physical environment. White argues that if policies took a relational wellbeing approach, they could address these issues and promote a more inclusive society. However, it is important to consider the complexities and idiosyncrasies of individuals' experiences.

Within all persons there is conflict and ambivalence between belonging and autonomy. And collectivities are neither simply a sum of individuals nor some kind of super-individual in themselves, but develop emergent properties according to the relations which compose them. (White 2017: 129)

Bangladesh is generally considered a communal society. However, Dhaka is an industrial megacity that has been transformed by global capitalism. Relational wellbeing must be considered within this specific context.

Literature from Bangladesh

Gender, Families and Purdah

In the late seventies, Cain et al. (1979) wrote about how systems of patriarchy prevailed in Bangladesh through religion, family relationships and politics. They observed that men controlled women through their dominance over income, property, and female labour. More recently, Bangladesh has been described as remaining a deeply patriarchal society (Choudhury, 2013). The majority of Bangladesh's population are Muslim, but gender values as well as many customs and rituals are similar to Bengalis of all the major religions; Muslims, Hindus, Buddhist or Christian (Rozario 2006). The form of Islam followed in Bangladesh is heavily influenced by Hinduism (Rozario and Samuel 2010). There have been various movements since the 18th Century that have attempted to purify Islam with various degrees of success. While they have made the most impact in recent years with the rise of Islamist political parties and the adoption of the *burqa* by a significant number of women, these practices are still not mainstream (ibid). Religion does have a significant effect on women's situations, but more significant are the localised practices and beliefs (Rozario 2006).

An anthropologist, Rozario (2007), describes the life and place of a well-educated, single Bangladeshi woman who migrated to Australia. She explores the relationship that women have with their families and how they fit into their communities. She found that single women did not have a place within the Bangladeshi social structure, and therefore did not receive the respect that they craved and were often assumed to be immoral. While these women's situations are far removed from the participants in my research, Rozario's following observation highlights the situation of women who do not fall into traditional norms and the importance of male guardianship in women's lives:

Their marginality relates to the fundamental importance of marriage to mature women in Bengali society: it transforms them from children to adults. In other words, the only socially-sanctioned status enjoyed by mature women within the Bengali social order is as wives and mothers. A single woman usually devotes all her resources and energy to her natal family in the hope of raising her status, and perhaps breaking through the cultural barrier that keeps her permanently locked on the margins; however her marginal situation cannot ultimately be overcome. At the end of the day, she is treated at most with pity and at worst as a total outsider, whose presence is a matter of constant irritation and trouble to her father's family. (2007:155)

A key component to the issue of women needing a 'guardian' is the space they are allowed to operate in. Historically this is regulated through the system of *purdah*, which contributes to segments of society resisting the employment of women outside the home situation (Choudhury 2013). Bangladesh has one of the lowest rates of female employment in the world. In 2017, 33% of women in Bangladesh were involved in the labour force, compared to 49% of women in the world (World Bank Group 2018b). Kabeer (2000) discusses the patriarchal system in Bangladesh as a social contract. It is the man's responsibility to provide materially and to protect women. However, male responsibility is 'normatively controlled' (42) and can, therefore, be negotiated when it is an economic necessity. This is important to consider in light of the rise in female employment.

Since its conception as a nation, Bangladesh has heavily relied on foreign aid. Many of the NGOs and development programmes include a gender component. One of the most famous, Grameen Bank, provides credit to poor women through saving groups (Yunus 2003). Mohammed Yunus's model of microcredit has been replicated around the world and hailed as an important approach for women's empowerment (Bernasek 2003). For many years there have been similar programmes designed to improve women's conditions. However, White (1992) states that these programmes have taken a 'soft' approach and have not addressed structural issues. She argued that development programmes took a universalist approach to gender, constructing the homogenous group of the 'Bangladeshi woman', and have failed to understand the complexities of women's lives.

In recent years Bangladesh has done consistently well in development indicators such as female enrolment in schools (Asadullah et al. 2014). These changes have included attitudes towards women taking paid employment due to economic and wider social factors. Employment can increase women's bargaining power within the household and improve their living situations (Heath 2014). Research carried out in neighbouring India found that female employment in households increases the age of marriage and childbearing (Jensen 2012). However, the outcome of these changes is not always empowering for women. They are often employed when their families are in financial hardship and their need to work can be viewed as a failure of the male breadwinner to provide for his family (Choudhury 2013). In many cases, women do not have control over their earnings (F. D. Chowdhury 2009; Kabeer 2000). Research conducted by

Heath (2014) found that female employment can both increase and decrease levels of domestic violence depending on the level of bargaining power women initially had within the family structure. Rozario (2007) argues that while significant changes have taken place for women through urbanisation, changes in family structure and employment opportunities for women, the 'underlying gender ideology' (157) has not changed. A theory of change explores and seeks to understand the processes of how change is achieved. It could be used to assist in understanding why women make certain changes to their lives but not others. However, I have not found any studies that do so in the context of Bangladesh.

Women's Employment

Agency is key to understanding the complexities of women's labour. Kabeer (2000) argues that traditional economics, greatly influenced by rational choice theory, over emphasises individuals' agency and does not recognise the structures that guide people's choices. However, she also argues that those who place too much focus on structures often deny people's agency. In reality, agency and social structures are interdependent (ibid). Kabeer (2000) applied Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital to her research and found that female garments workers in Bangladesh drew from the resources available to them. They were:

Neither the free-floating, atomised individuals of neo-classical analysis nor did they resemble the 'structural dopes' of certain sociological portrayals. Rather, they were persons-in-relationships, individuals whose preferences and priorities reflected their own unique histories and subjectivities, but also bore the imprint of the complex of social relationships to which they belonged and which determined their place in society. (327)

Kabeer (2000) describes how women who participated in her research would usually comply to gender norms, often giving their resources to their husbands, and not challenging the patriarchal systems that they were in. However, at the same time, they were not passive in their relationships with others and actively made decisions.

Kabeer, with Mahmud and Tasneem, conducted research more recently for the Pathway of Women's Empowerment and Institute of Development Studies (Kabeer, Mahmud, and Tasneem 2011). They used both quantitative and qualitative methods to look at whether women were empowered through employment in Bangladesh, looking at different forms of employment rather than focusing exclusively on the more commonly researched forms of work, which are the

garments industry and income generation from microcredit loans. The researchers found that empowerment was realised through cognitive, material, and relational resources. They argue:

Access to paid work, the key material resource that featured in our analysis, does make a difference to women's lives, but its impact is strongest and most consistent in the case of women whose employment is characterised by some degree of regularity, visibility and social benefits. (39)

Women who were economically active were more likely to make decisions regarding their own health. However, it was only women in formal employment who had a significantly increased likelihood of having their own savings and of investing their income in major assets. They were also more likely to be mobile outside the home and have knowledge of labour laws. Women in informal work outside the home exercised more mobility but also had higher levels of stress, expressed less optimism about the future and higher levels of poverty. This can be explained by the harassment many women face in public. Education was a significant factor in improving women's situations and was the most commonly identified source of empowerment from women themselves. Involvement with NGOs enabled women to invest in assets but also increased levels of stress, probably due to concerns regarding repayment. Apart from formal employment, the two strongest variables promoting women's empowerment were watching TV regularly and doing work valued by family. Family support, including husbands' positive attitudes, allowed women to have greater autonomy and to feel valued.

It is important to recognise that while there are many changes that have taken place, marriage remained the single most important institution in the lives of women who participated in the research. Women who were separated, divorced, or widowed were more mobile and had greater autonomy but reported less optimism about the future, less control over the direction of their lives and greater levels of stress. They were more likely to be involved in informal work outside the home, which exposed them to abuse. This report provides a fascinating insight regarding how employment affects women in Bangladesh. Many of the results are reflected in my own research. However, there are significant differences because my research was based in Dhaka. I came across very few women who were not economically active and a significant number were working in garments factories.

The Garments Industry

Banerjee Saxena (2011) describes the garments industry as being 'full of contradictions'. She explains that many factories have good conditions, there have been significant improvements in recent years and women describe benefits of working in them. However poor conditions, industry tragedies and protests continue. The garments industry has become the largest source of external income for Bangladesh (Mottaleb and Sonobe 2011). The industry makes up eighty percent of the country's exports (Srivastava 2014). Most of the workers in garment factories are young women who are either unmarried or without children, and migrate to Dhaka from rural areas in search of employment (Amin, Naved, and Newby 1998; Kabeer and Mahmud 2004). One study estimated that in 2012 approximately fifteen percent of women aged fifteen years old to thirty years old in Bangladesh were employed by the garments industry (Heath and Mobarak 2015). While in theory competitive markets allow participants the choice to move in and out of employment, in reality free markets create jobs that are frequently poorly paid and difficult to leave because of a lack of alternative options (Heintz, Cook, and Kabeer 2008).

Despite the negative press coverage and criticism of the garments industry, many hold the view that it has improved the lives of women in Bangladesh. Unsurprisingly, the business world, which benefits from cheap female labour, highlights the positive aspects of the industry. An article in one of the most prominent business magazines, the Bloomsbury Business Week, recognised that in Bangladesh the dangerous working conditions of garments factories were the cause of at least 2,000 deaths since 2005, and that employees endure long working hours and poor pay (Srivastava 2014). However, they argued that overall the industry has had a positive effect on workers, illustrated by the fact that women choose to stay in the industry. The article claims that the garments industry has helped cut poverty by a third in Bangladesh, that it has increased the number of girls attending school due to better financial situations of families and that those working in the garments industry are paid thirteen percent more than they would in other forms of manual labour. Though these claims may be exaggerated, there is evidence that the garments industry can have a positive impact on workers' lives. For example, in the 1990s due to raised awareness of child labour, between 50,000 and 60,000 children under fifteen years old were made redundant from garments factories, and many of these children ended up in more dangerous working situations (Wahra and Rahman 1995). Furthermore, Amin *et al.* (1998) found that girls working in garments factories in Bangladesh could delay their marriage and their age

of childbearing, decreasing health risks associated with early childbirth.

A key factor in measuring how much women gain from working in the garments industry is the level of independence this work gives them. Kibria (1995) investigated the role of economic independence in relation to work through in-depth interviews with thirty-four women working in garments factories. She found that in many situations, women's husbands controlled their earnings and concluded that apart from young, unmarried women, female employment did not pose a great challenge to the patriarchal systems in families. Even so, all the participants in this research reported that their work was overall a positive experience and one that improved their self-esteem. Several years later, research carried out by Absar (2002) looked into the living conditions of garments workers through conducting interviews with thirty-five women who all complained of low wages, poor working conditions, high rent and poor housing. However, research with garments workers carried out by Kabeer and Mahmud (2004), found that many of the participants reported feeling more independent and confident because of being able to work outside the home.

Another central aspect of evaluating the effect of the garments industry on workers' lives is the claim of significantly reducing poverty. While it is certain that the garments industry has brought wealth into Bangladesh, who benefits from this wealth is the more disputed question. Kabeer and Mahmud (2004) interviewed 1,322 garments workers to investigate the effect of the garments industry on poverty levels in workers' households. They found that economically poor women were able to improve their home situations and the garments industry opened up job opportunities that they would not otherwise have had. Most participants had entered the labour force for the first time. Even so, participants reported a high staff turnover and viewed their work as insecure. Most thought that they could not remain working in the garments industry long-term due to a lack of childcare facilities and the physical toll the work took on them.

The studies discussed above highlight the complexities of the experiences and lives of women who work in the garments industry in Bangladesh. Their working conditions are often difficult and exploitative. People have died due to the poor conditions of the factories and workers continue to work in harsh conditions, while the companies running the industry have made millions in profits. However, researchers have found that many women have gained

independence and have benefited through their employment. The industry is simultaneously both exploitative and empowering, not one or the other. Furthermore, various factories and parts of the industry have different conditions. The garments industry has been given a high level of attention in both the media and by researchers. However, it is important to consider other types of work that women are engaged in.

Other Forms of Urban Low-income Employment for Women

Another prominent form of low-income employment that participants were or had been involved in is domestic work. I have found little research on domestic workers in Bangladesh and the studies that I found focus on child domestic workers (Blanchet 1996; Hoque 1995; Jensen 2014). Domestic workers are commonly employed in middle and upper-class Bangladeshi homes, and these employees are mainly female. A survey of 14,800 child domestic workers found that a third were between the ages of nine and eleven years old (ILO 2006). Numbers of domestic workers are rising because of the increase in the middle classes without a proportionate growth in childcare facilities, convenience foods or technology, making household work both labour and time-intensive (Jensen 2014). The violence and exploitation that many children face in these situations is well-documented (Blanchet 1996; Hoque 1995). Jensen (2014) described the twenty-four child domestic workers whom she interviewed as having 'thin agency' with limited choices and freedoms. Even so, a significant number of the girls expressed pride in their work and felt that it prevented them from having an early marriage. A number of the participants of my research had been live-in domestic workers as children. Others were women who worked or had worked in families' homes during the day and returned home at night. I have found little research on this work, though they are mentioned in one piece of research that I found on women in different forms of low-income employment by Ward et al. (2004). I will discuss this in detail further on in the chapter.

Another form of low-income employment for women in Bangladesh is construction work. Again, there is a lack of research on this group. Construction workers are primarily part of the informal sector and there is little training or regulations in the trade. Women who are employed in this area are part of the poorest segments of society and receive low pay or sometimes only payment in kind (Choudhury 2013). Unlike the garments or domestic work, construction is a male dominated industry. Choudhury (2013) carried out in-depth interviews with twelve female

construction workers. She found that there was a complex mixture of positive and negative experiences described by the participants. All the women reported receiving lower pay than their male colleagues and saw this as unfair. Most felt shame because of having to work and often tried to hide the fact that they were employed from others. Almost every one of the participants described sexual harassment as a common part of their work place. They said that men would hire young, attractive girls and some of these girls would have sex with men on the site as well as work in construction. However, the majority of women reported increased independence and said that having their own money improved their self-esteem. Women's complex mixture of positive and negative views of their work is a prominent theme that continues as sex workers' experiences in Bangladesh are considered.

In my research, I came across many forms of employment such as home-based sari work⁴, tailoring, tea stalls and street side selling of vegetables. However, I was unable to find specific research on any of these forms of informal work. The sale of sex is, as in other countries, viewed as quite different from other forms of female employment, and unlike the garments industry, it has a long history of employing women in the region.

Selling Sex in Bangladesh

Historical Discussion on Prostitution

There is a long history of prostitution⁵ in India, which Bangladesh was part of until partition occurred in 1949. There are records as far back as the fourth century B.C. that gave women in prostitution directions on how to deal with customers (Frances 2011). Hinduism had established and respected systems during medieval times of women providing sexual services as well as having artistic, social, and intellectual roles (Frances, 2011). Devadasis were women who were dedicated to Hindu temples and trained in reciting poetry and dancing who often had long-term sexual alliances with higher caste men (Levine 2003). Their secular counterparts were courtesans who were highly trained in performing arts and entertained wealthy men, before the British period, in royal palaces (ibid). Lower class women in prostitution were seen as helping to maintain social order and giving an accepted outlet for men's sexual needs (Frances 2011).

⁴The type of sari work that participants were involved in was gluing beads onto saris

⁵I use the term 'prostitution' in this section because historically this was the word used to discuss the sale of sex.

Thus historically brothels existed but these grew and became more established during the British period (Levine 2003).

In the seventeenth century, the British East India Company arrived in India. British rule expanded the sex industry by bringing a new clientele and widening the socioeconomic background of the women involved (Frances 2011; Levine 2003). The great increase in women involved in prostitution was due to the high demand created by a predominately male workforce of colonisers. Furthermore, increased urbanisation, through the businesses run by the British Empire in economic and political centres such as Calcutta and Bombay, greatly influenced the sex industry because there were larger groups of women in urban areas who had few work choices other than prostitution (Frances 2011). During the period of British rule, the status of many women in prostitution decreased, particularly the status of the Devadasis and courtesans (Frances 2011; Levine 2003). The British classified them as prostitutes because of their sexual relationships with elite, upper caste men (Frances, 2011). The colonisers looked down on these women's occupations and actively tried to discourage them, resulting in many changing their role to primarily selling sex (Levine 2003). Lower class women in prostitution had never had a very high status but their links and dependence on foreigners, who were considered unclean, further demeaned their position in society (Frances 2011).

Colonisers widely held the belief that prostitution helped maintain social order and worked towards the protection of 'good' women because men could have their sexual needs met elsewhere (Frances 2011). However, prostitution was seen as problematic to the empire for several different reasons, firstly because of its association with the spread of venereal disease, secondly interracial sex was seen as undermining colonisers' authority and finally because prostitution was perceived as undermining colonisers' status (Frances 2011; Levine 2003). The high level of venereal diseases in the British army in India took a significant economic toll. The British colonisers responded by implementing the Cantonment Act for military areas in 1864 and extended regulations to all cities through the Indian Contagious Diseases Act of 1868. These Acts required women in prostitution to have regular health checks and restricted them to certain areas. While in many ways this was a pragmatic response, the Acts gave no attention to the men involved; they focused on controlling women as Levine (2003) argues:

The moral illegitimacy of the occupation, its status as nonwork, helped justify the

coercive and one-way nature of legislation that at no point in history seriously sought to question or control male sexual behaviour. (2003: 46)

The effect of regulations was to professionalise prostitution and mark out women in prostitution as separate from the rest of society. It often caused women to live in brothels or clearly defined and concentrated spaces (Frances 2011). Several of these brothels still exist in Bangladesh today.

Current Situation of Women who Sell Sex in Bangladesh

Despite its long history, the sale of sex was given little attention in Bangladesh until the 1990s, when awareness of the risk of HIV and sex workers being identified as a high-risk group caused a number of NGOs to create services for them. The Bangladeshi government's response to the sex industry has been mixed and the legal status of women who sell sex is unclear. The constitution states that the government should work towards the prevention of prostitution and it is illegal to solicit on the streets (Sabet and Ahmed 2012; Haque 2011). However, there has been a long-standing system of women registering with the magistrate court when entering a brothel. Women entering the brothels to work must be over eighteen years old and state that they have consented to the work (Jenkins and Rahman 2002; Sabet and Ahmed 2012). Licencing of brothels is mandatory and sex worker is a profession included on the voters' register (Haque 2011). Additionally, following the sex workers' movement, which will be discussed in more detail further on, the courts upheld the legal right for women to work as sex workers (Jenkins and Rahman 2002; Sabet and Ahmed 2012).

Researchers and NGO workers commonly refer to sex workers in categories according to where they work geographically (Sabet and Ahmad 2012). The two main categories used are brothel-based sex workers and 'floating' sex workers. Floating sex workers include hotel-based sex workers, home-based sex workers and street-based sex workers. Brothel-based sex workers refer to the women who work in the fourteen established brothels in different parts of the country (ibid). These brothels are communities in themselves and are largely cut off from the rest of society; in contrast, floating sex workers live within the wider community (Jenkins and Rahman, 2002). Additionally, there are casual sex workers who engage in sex work on a part-time basis (Sabet and Ahmad 2012).

Research has found that abuses of human rights, extreme stigma and experiences of violence are common for sex workers in Bangladesh (Alam and Faiz 2012; CARE Bangladesh 2004; Haque 2011; Moral and Tahmina 2004; Ullah 2005). Perpetrators of violence are both the clients and the police (Haque 2011; Ullah 2005). Brothels in Bangladesh operate a system of bonded labour (Hosain and Chatterjee 2005; Jenkins and Rahman 2002; Sabet and Ahmed 2012). Women and girls are sold into brothels by traffickers, often women promising work or men with whom they have had a relationship. They are bought by madams and then work to pay off the amount that they were bought for before they are allowed to earn their own wage. The majority of bonded individuals are under eighteen years old and gaining their freedom takes anywhere from one to five years (Jenkins and Rahman 2002; Sabet and Ahmad 2012).

Most interventions for women in the sex industry are carried out by NGOs. There are a range of different services including condom distribution, basic health care provisions, drop-in centres for homeless sex workers, rights-based and awareness raising interventions, savings groups and income generating activities. Government services for sex workers are generally limited to vagrant homes. There are six vagrant homes run by the government that provide shelter, medical treatment and training for the sex workers who end up in these facilities (Haque 2011). However, these homes are described as being prison-like with poor conditions, overcrowding, unhygienic facilities, wide-spread abuse and women having to bribe staff to leave. Haque (2011) reports that he was informed by officials that in 2005 the amount spent per person was being increased to 1000tk per month, which is approximately £9.65.

Sex work is the generally accepted term used by NGOs, researchers, and policy makers in Bangladesh. Most NGOs, though there are exceptions, accept the view that sex work is work (Sabet and Ahmad 2012). The majority of organisations focus on the areas of HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, as well as legal support and human rights issues (Alam and Faiz 2012). There are several mobile clinics for sex workers and organisations distribute condoms (Haque 2011). NGOs have also played an important role in providing childcare, safe housing and schools for the children of sex workers because they are at high risk of abuse, face high levels of stigma and often have difficulty attending mainstream school. Furthermore, there are groups of sex workers who are mobilised to recognise and fight for their rights. These organisations were initiated and largely funded by NGOs (ibid).

The prominent role of NGOs in Bangladesh is reflected in the research conducted on the sex industry. Much of the research is carried out by NGOs and development agencies themselves (BNWLA 1999; CARE Bangladesh 2004; Iyengar and Rout 2008; Terre des Hommes Italy 2005). A group of studies was conducted by a private university in Bangladesh for a conference on sex workers and their children (Alam and Faiz 2012; Bernabe 2012; Siddiqua and Matin 2012). Although the research was carried out by the university, it was funded by ActionAid, a donor organisation. Some of the reasons that NGOs dominate the research are the difficulties in gaining access for other researchers, the NGOs' role in working with sex workers and a response to concerns of donor agencies. Both HIV and sex trafficking have had a significant amount of international attention and most of the NGOs are dependent on outside funding. NGOs supported the sex workers' movement, which shaped the course of interventions with sex workers in Bangladesh.

Sex Workers' Movement in Bangladesh

The sex workers' movement is relevant to my research because it provides an example of sex workers' collective agency, illustrates sex workers' relationships with NGOs and was the subject of one of the few studies exploring sex workers' identities in Bangladesh. When organisations began to work with sex workers to prevent the spread of HIV, it became apparent that in order to work effectively, sex workers needed to be empowered to take control of their situations and enforce the protective measures that they were being taught. Capacity building and empowerment programmes were therefore run alongside health awareness services, and with the support of development agencies, several sex workers' forums were formed (Chowdhury 2006).

The sex workers' movement gained media attention when two brothels were closed, resulting in approximately 2,500 sex workers being evicted from their homes (R. Chowdhury 2006; Huq 2006). These closures were caused by a combination of pressure due to the value of land, local politics, and concerns regarding AIDS (Jenkins and Rahman 2002). The evictions caused widespread fear among brothel-based sex workers. During this time, approximately 300 sex workers were placed in government vagrants' homes but were released after campaigns received press attention. The government then announced that six new shelters were going to

be built to 'rehabilitate' sex workers and all brothels would be closed. Sixty-two NGOs joined with sex workers groups to form a coalition called *Shonghoti*, meaning 'Solidarity', and took the evictors to court. In March 2000, the High Court of Bangladesh ruled that the evictions were illegal and that sex workers had a right to earn a living (Jenkins and Rahman, 2002). Huq called the movement a 'milestone in the history of women's movements in Bangladesh' (2006:134). She argues that for the first time, women's sexual freedom was openly fought for. As a result of the movement, the courts upheld women's legal right to sell sex in brothels and there were no further mass evictions. Additionally, the language used by the media was changed from *potita* (fallen woman) to *jouno kormi* (sex worker), and views regarding the need to rehabilitate sex workers were challenged (Huq 2006).

Chowdhury (2006) conducted an ethnographic study with sex workers who were part of this movement and explored the deconstruction of their identities as 'bad/ spoiled girl' and their reconstruction of an identity as a sex worker. Chowdhury followed Snow and Anderson's (1987) distinction between social identity and personal identity. She noted that the sex workers had taken on the negative social identity placed on them by wider society. They would often refer to themselves as fallen women (Azim 2000). However, through the sex workers' movement they were able to reconstruct their identity into a more positive view of themselves as workers and activists (Chowdhury 2006). Key factors to this reconstruction were taking on identities of valued women, citizens, and labourers, fighting for collective rights and shared experiences of oppression and resistance (ibid).

Sex workers often perceive themselves as providing a service that protects the morality of wider society (Azim 2000; R. Chowdhury 2006). The reasoning behind this view is that men have sexual needs that have to be met, and, without sex workers to meet these needs, women and girls in wider society would be put at risk. Azim (2000) points out that the sex workers' movement did not challenge these views and often encouraged them. The movement avoided wider debates regarding the nature of sex work and whether it is inherently exploitative. The stance that was taken was a practical one. The sex workers were reacting to the emergency they were facing of losing their home and livelihood and understood the need to win the sympathies of the wider society. The middle-class activists and NGO workers who supported them were responding to the immediate needs that the sex workers presented, without addressing

conflicting theoretical views of selling sex (ibid).

The group of women involved in the sex workers' movement are not the focus of my research, because my research participants did not live or work in brothels. However, my key gatekeeper into the sex workers' community and several participants were clearly affected by the movement. The language they used to describe their work and reasons they gave for it were very similar to the research described above. Furthermore, Chowdhury's research provides one of the few examples of an exploration of sex workers' identities in the Bangladeshi context and provides useful insights into views of sex work and sexuality. Understanding the way in which this group of sex workers had constructed their identity gives important insight into how they viewed themselves as both separate from mainstream society and playing a role for society. It illustrates how these women can be viewed as playing a role in protecting the morality of wider society, as well as being a stigmatised group and, how sex workers themselves take on a negative view of their identity.

Women who Sell Sex in Dhaka

There are no official brothels in Dhaka and, therefore, all sex workers fall into the category of 'floating sex workers'. They are street, hotel and/or residence based, and there is fluidity between these categories. Many street-based sex workers have links with hotels and hotel-based sex workers often have periods of time when hotels are closed that they work on the streets (Alam and Faiz 2012). Though the population of sex workers outside the brothels is higher than brothel-based sex workers, there are relatively few studies conducted on this group. However, significant research conducted provides some understanding of the scale of sex work in Dhaka, and the living situations and experiences of sex workers.

Save the Children Australia (2011) conducted a survey which estimated that there were 11,320 sex workers in the Dhaka district and most of these sex workers were street-based. Alam and Faiz (2011) carried out qualitative research, interviewing forty-seven floating sex workers. It illustrates how some women entered the industry and their experiences once in it. Many of the participants came to Dhaka looking for work as domestic help or in garments factories, thirty-six percent had been raped before entering sex work and thirty-eight percent had been sold to brothels or hotels by pimps who most often coerced them through promises of a job or marriage.

Those who had been raped or sold felt that they had been spoiled and therefore viewed themselves as having few options other than sex work. The stigma attached to sex work meant that once a woman sold sex, it was difficult for her to leave the industry. Other reasons for not leaving were the levels of freedom and income that they had through sex work, which can pay considerably more than other forms of female low-income employment.

Studies have found that stigma prevents sex workers from accessing health services, particularly street based sex workers who find it more difficult to conceal their identity (Alam and Faiz 2012; Ara 2005; CARE Bangladesh 2004; Moral and Tahmina 2004). Ullah (2005) found that many sex workers hid their identity from family members by saying that they work in garments factories or medical clinics. During focus group discussions, Alam and Faiz (2012) observed a significant level of fighting and name calling between the sex workers. They referred to themselves and each other as 'bad' women and to sex work as 'bad work'. However, all the sex workers who participated in the research believed that sex work should be fully legalised (ibid). This demonstrates the complex relationship sex workers have with their identity; although they called themselves and their work 'bad', they believed that it is their right to sell sex.

Haque (2011) carried out research on floating sex workers in Dhaka for his PhD. He found that many of the participants were controlled by pimps though the system was not as structured as in the brothels. They reported finding it difficult to rent a home and were often evicted by landlords when their identity was revealed. Similarly, Ullah (2005) found that many floating sex workers gave a significant amount of their income to pimps. Haque (2011) reported that most women did not want to continue in the industry and many sought male protection, whether through marriage or a regular customer. However, a number of the participants in Haque's research viewed their work as providing a needed service. They expressed anger at society's hypocrisy towards them and had dreams for their children's future outside the sex industry.

Sex work and Other Low-income Urban Employment in Dhaka

I am interested in the crossover between selling sex and other forms of low-income employment for women. The literature that I have discussed above illustrates that there are clear links and similarities between these forms of work. The majority of garments workers, sex workers and domestic workers are young women and often begin working when they are under eighteen

years old. The garments industry has brought a huge number of women into urban employment and, like sex workers, they often live outside the traditional family situation and societal norms (Absar 2002). Alam and Faiz (2012) found that most women initially moved to Dhaka looking for work in the garments industry or domestic work before entering the sex industry. The research Choudhury (2013) carried out with construction workers suggests that this work can involve selling sex.

In a unique study of female low-income employment, Ward et al. (2004) conducted forty-four interviews with women working in the garments industry, micro-credit programmes, sex work and domestic work. The purpose of the study was to explore the different types of employment women engaged in and the effects that changes to laws that threatened to lessen garments factory jobs would have on women. They found that there was a fluid relationship between these different forms of employment. Women often started in one type of work and then moved to another or work in multiple areas. For example, most sex workers had been domestic workers and there was an increase in street-based sex workers when garments factories shut down. The sex workers who participated in my research are in many ways distinctly set apart from the other women in my research. However, many of the overlaps existed such as housing and socio-economic conditions, children, past experiences of work and negotiating identities in urban situations.

Gaps in Research

The current literature provides critical insights into the lives of women in low income employment and the theoretical concepts that can be used to try and understand their lives. However, there are several gaps in the research that my study tries to begin to fill. In Bangladesh there is no research that explores the sale of sex in the wider context of work, studies do not explore concepts of agency in oppressive situations or the identities of women in urban employment in depth, and there is no ethnographic research that looks at women's day-to-day experiences of this work in the context of their broader lives. I will consider each of these gaps in more detail.

To fully understand women's experiences of selling sex, its place in the wider discussion of work must be considered. The important work of Ward et. al. (2004) highlights the crossover of different forms of low-income employment, including sex work. However, other than this study,

there is little research in Bangladesh that places sex workers' experiences in the wider context of women's work in general. From the literature, it is clear that women do not sell sex in isolation; most have been involved in other forms of work and their experiences overlap with women in other forms of employment. The existing research also shows that women who sell sex face unique legal and social challenges. The stigma and violence that they experience is more extreme than for most other women. Exploring this type of work as a subgroup of other women in employment allows for a greater understanding of both groups. I therefore designed my research to explore the lives of both groups, filling a gap in the literature.

There have been several studies that explore experiences of agency and exploitation of women working in the garments industry in Bangladesh (Banerjee Saxena 2014; Kabeer 2000; Kabeer, Mahmud, and Tasneem 2011; Kabeer and Mahmud 2004). My research builds on these studies to explore in more depth how women exercise agency and make decisions in oppressive situations. Furthermore, I aim to apply these concepts to women in other forms of employment and to their experiences of day-to-day lives. I will therefore be adding to the current literature on agency and address the gap in research that applies concepts of agency to a wider group of women. There has been less attention given to Bangladeshi women's identities. I only found one piece of research that concentrates on the construction of identities: Chowdhury's (2006) study on the sex workers' movement. To fill this gap in the literature, I will use theoretical understandings of identity to better understand how different women in low income employment view themselves and others.

There is a lack of ethnographic research on women in low income employment in Bangladesh. While ethnography is not the only methodology that can be used to gain a deep and complex understanding of people, it does offer an important method for doing so. It allows for the study of day-to-day life, social interactions, and people's views in their natural environments over a long period of time. Most ethnographic research on women has taken place outside Dhaka. I found no ethnographic research set in Dhaka that explores women's identities with regards to work and urbanisation. I therefore designed my research to address this gap.

Summary

Experiences of space, agency, and identity are the three main themes that have informed my research because I found them to be central to women's experiences. The literature illustrates how gendered spaces restrict women's activities and access to power. *Purdah* is a practice that determines women's movement. However, it is experienced and practised differently by women depending on their position in place and time as well as community, family and personal beliefs. Practices of *purdah* impact how women experience work. Women have engaged in different forms of labour throughout history although this has been undervalued and given little attention. Capitalism and globalisation have brought new forms of work to women in the Global South which have been hailed as both highly exploitative and a source of empowerment.

Similar debates are made regarding the sale of sex. While many argue that it objectifies women and is therefore fundamentally exploitative, others argue that it is a legitimate form of work that women choose to engage with. I argue that women should not be viewed through the lense of broad theoretical categories but instead understood from their individual perspectives and experiences. It is important to understand both exploitative structures and women's agency within these structures. Oppression and agency are not mutually exclusive entities. Women's identities provide belonging and a sense of place. However, identities can also be highly stigmatising. In order to understand women's experiences, I had to understand the impact of their identities, how stigma could be managed and the relevance of place to their identities.

Research has explored how gender shapes the experiences of women in Bangladesh, particularly in relation to family relationships. Marriage is of central importance to women's status and identity. *Purdah* is practised throughout the country, though generally in its looser forms. Notions of *purdah* have restricted women's engagement in the labour force. However, the rise of the garments industry has brought large numbers of women into outside employment and this is a phenomenon that has been widely studied. Research shows that although the working conditions are often oppressive, women utilise their agency within these conditions. Other forms of low income urban employment have received less attention. However there have been studies on domestic workers and construction workers.

The sale of sex has a long history in the geographical area that is now Bangladesh. Brothels

that were formed during the British period still exist today. Research on sex workers reveals experiences of stigma, violence and social isolation. However, there was a powerful movement of sex workers to prevent brothels from being closed and to be recognised as workers. This movement illustrates the agency that sex workers have demonstrated in fighting for their rights. There are currently no brothels in Dhaka. Therefore, the sale of sex is carried out on the streets and in hotels. Most sex workers have engaged in other forms of work such as domestic work or in garments factories.

There is a theme running through the literature on all the different forms of female low-income work; that is, the complex coexistence of exploitation and agency for women. The very entry of women into employment is often due to a lack of options, and once in employment low pay and poor working conditions are common experiences for women. At the same time, women identify the benefits of earning their own money and increased independence. Furthermore, urbanisation and employment bring about change in society and in the individual lives of women. However, cultural norms continue, and patriarchal systems are very much maintained. Women are trying to negotiate their positions and identities within these complex social realities.

Through the process of reviewing the literature on Bangladesh's urban female work force, a number of gaps were evident. Research on sex work was conducted outside the wider context of women's work. Concepts of agency, exploitation and identity deserve further attention and should to be applied to a wider group of women. There is a lack of ethnographic research. These gaps result in the research not portraying a holistic in-depth exploration of many women's lives. My research aims to build on existing studies and fill in the gaps in order to understand this crucial moment in women's history. Through learning how women understand themselves, negotiate their positions and utilise their agency, I will provide suggestions of how research, practice and policy can positively impact women's lives. In the next chapter, I will explain and justify how I chose to conduct my research.

Chapter Three:

Methodology, Methods and Context

Introduction

The purpose of my research is to understand participants' everyday lives, social interactions and perspectives. An ethnographic approach enabled me to achieve this goal through being situated in the context of women's lives and observing their day-to-day activities over an extended period of time. I used data collection methods common to ethnography: participant observation and in-depth individual and group interviews. As I was writing about the methodology and data collection methods, I realised that I could not separate the context of the research from how I conducted it. The participant observations or interviews cannot be understood without a description of the spaces in which they took place. Therefore, I include these descriptions.

In this chapter I explain, justify, and describe the decisions that I made throughout the research process. I tell the story of the journey that I took; planning the research, gathering the data, and analysing it. I begin by discussing the research questions that guided my research. I go on to justify the qualitative, ethnographic approach I took. I explain the relevance of grounded theory, social work research, feminist theory and post-colonial theory to my research. I describe the context and spaces in which the research took place. I describe and discuss the research methods: participant observations and individual and group interviews. Ethical concerns and challenges are an integral part of all research and I explore the issues that I grappled with during my study. I conclude with a discussion on reflexivity, reflecting on my effect on the research.

Research Questions

I chose to embark on a PhD because of my experiences of living in Bangladesh and working with women in precarious employment situations. My work led me to want to learn more about this group but found that there was an insufficient amount of research on the topic. Through reviewing the literature, I found that studies on different types of low income employment revealed the significant relationship between the sale of sex and other forms of low income female employment in Bangladesh. However, there was a clear lack of research on the crossover between these forms of work. Furthermore, studies had not explored in-depth the

identities that are formed in these types of employment, which has wider implications for women's relationship with society, their emotional well-being and sense of belonging. These gaps in the literature led me to my research questions. I included these questions in the thesis' introduction but will revisit them here because they played a central role in my methodological decision making process. The main question was:

'How do women who work in low income employment and/ or sell sex in Dhaka construct and negotiate their identities and understand their experiences in the social context of urbanisation and the changing role of women?'

The sub-questions were designed to break down the main question into parts that reflected the interconnectivity of personal experiences and social context.

The sub-questions were:

- * **How do women understand their personal experiences of employment and negotiate their multiple identities?**
- * **What are women's views on the sale of sex?**
- * **How do women interact with and how are they perceived by the communities in which they live and work?**
- * **How have wider demographic, societal, and cultural changes for urban women affected the situation of women selling sex?**

I compiled my research questions before beginning the data collection and during the process of field research, they guided the areas I was interested in exploring. Mason (2002) describes research questions as a 'formal expression of your intellectual puzzle' (20). As I gathered data, different topics and concepts became increasingly prominent. While some areas of interest gained more prominence and others less, the questions remained a helpful guide when faced with vast amounts of data (Blaikie 2009; Mason 2002). They steered my choices regarding information included in my fieldnotes and the questions asked when interacting with participants. My research findings connected to all the research questions and I will explicitly demonstrate this in the conclusion of the thesis. However, there were certain questions or aspects of questions that were more prominent as the research process unfolded. The areas of women's identities and how work affected their lives were particularly prominent. Being an ethnographic study, the questions were not a rigid list but a fluid guide.

Methodology

Ethnographic Research

My research questions focus on women's understandings of their experiences, their social interactions and context. To understand the complexity of the social world I took a qualitative approach, which recognises that the meanings placed on social realities are continuously being produced and re-produced by the social actors involved (Blaikie, 2010). Qualitative research allowed me to fulfil my goal of learning how women construct, place meaning and relate to the social world as they experienced it (O'Reilly, 2009). An ethnographic approach enabled me to gain an understanding of women's own interpretations of their experiences within their wider social context. If I had relied exclusively on interviews or focus groups, I would have gained a knowledge of women's perceptions but would not have had an in-depth view of their context, interaction with communities and the intricacies of changing and negotiated identities. Spending long periods of time with participants in their natural settings allowed me to observe interactions, habits and daily activities that gave a further understanding of their experiences and the meaning they placed on these experiences (Fielding 1993a). Central to ethnography is being close enough to participants to present the world from their point of view. Goffman (1961) argued that people 'develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable and normal once you get close to it' (ix-x). It is the ethnographer's job to 'get close' in order to understand these constructions.

According to Fielding (1993a), ethnography is a method of discovering. It is often employed to study groups of whom little is known about to outsiders. It is a way of enabling those outside the group to understand participants' cultures with detailed insight into social processes. I recognise that the meanings placed on social realities are continuously being produced and re-produced by the social actors involved (Blaikie, 2010). Therefore, a static record of a group of people could never be produced. Instead the findings must be understood as a record of people in a specific place and time. This research with a specific group of women allowed me to learn about their world in a moment of time and to gain a holistic understanding of relationships, connections and processes within their culture (Denscombe 2014). It involved interactive relationships with participants: they got to know me as I got to know them (Brown 2008).

Key to ethnography is 'thick description', the famous phrase coined by Geertz (1973), which is

at the heart of all ethnographic research. The researcher produces a detailed account of a culture. Geertz believed that cultures should be read as texts and placed emphasis on symbols in finding meaning. Hoffman (2009) points out the importance of linking findings regarding culture and symbols with broader social and political factors. Utilising ethnographic methods provided tools to explore the micro effects of macro policies and societal changes through every day actions and interactions (Gobo, 2011). These are important elements of social work research. In the 1920s and 30s ethnography was radically changed and developed by what was called the 'Chicago School'. Many of these ethnographers had a background in social work and their research concentrated on understanding the lives of disadvantaged groups. Fielding (1993a) described the 'Chicago School' as bringing 'campaigning' and a 'critical edge' to ethnography (156).

Ethnography was an approach that allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of women's lives and to place their experiences in a broader, cultural context. It enabled me to explore participants' spaces and provided me with a richness of data and understanding of context that I would not otherwise have access to. I was able to look at participants' lives holistically, explore the world from their point of view, gain an understanding of their social interactions and explore macro issues through individuals' everyday lives. Part of the relevance of ethnography is the commitment to being rooted and 'grounded' in people's experiences.

Grounded Theory

O'Reilly (2009) argues that ethnographic research often uses a grounded theory approach because of its focus on being 'grounded' in the data. When I was planning my research, I thought grounded theory was an appropriate method to use because I wanted to be guided by the data and learn from the participants at each stage of the research. Charmaz (2006) described grounded theory as consisting of "systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves" (2). Glaser and Strauss (1967) designed grounded theory in order for qualitative research to be methodical, practical and firmly based on data. Their methods include purposeful sampling for theory development, simultaneously collecting and analysing data, coding findings and writing memos of themes emerging from the data. They emphasised the importance of not going into research with preconceived ideas and, therefore, discouraged researchers from doing an extensive

literature review before the data collection stage. However, grounded theory has evolved and developed since those early stages. Charmaz (2006) views theories as a social construct in themselves. She sees the value of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the field and relevant theories through literature but warns against letting this overly influence data collection and analysis (ibid).

As I began my field research, I followed Charmaz's methods as laid out in *Constructing Grounded Theory* and found these useful while collecting data. These methods will be discussed in more detail further on in the chapter. However, as I came to analysing my data, I found the method less helpful and disagreed with some of its foundational assumptions. Thomas and James (2006) are critical of grounded theory and claim that it places negative constraints on qualitative research. They argue that it tries to imitate the natural sciences which leads to a misreading of the social world. Tolhurst (2012) agrees, explaining that while many grounded theorists try to move away from the method's positivist roots, they retain claims that echo the natural sciences. This creates a confused method that is more about legitimising qualitative research methods than helpful to it.

Thomas and James (2006) criticise the claim that grounded theory enables researchers to discover a new 'theory' emerging from the data that would be obvious to any researcher following the same methods. They argue that this suggests that data can and should exist separate from the researchers. Researchers are full of notions and experiences. Far from putting these aside, as grounded theory would suggest, 'these are precisely the things that comprise and give structure to their mental lives. They are what make the drawing of themes from data possible' (784). Data and interpretation cannot be separated. Grounded theory's claim to 'discover' theory suggests that theory exists in isolation waiting to be found and 'therefore puts that theory a long way from interpretation' (785).

I found that I could only understand and analyse my data by building on existing literature and theories. There was no emerging theory for me to discover. Even so, I did find the practical instructions provided in Charmaz's (2006) book useful as I waded through my data. The system of writing memos with impressions and analytical ideas and advice on line by line coding provided me with vital tools in the midst of all the messiness and complexity of qualitative data

and analysis. Furthermore, reading about grounded theory and its critiques enabled me to think through my own understanding of theories and knowledge. I was able to theorise from my data and the practical tools gained from grounded theory assisted me with this process.

Social Work Research

Social work research is committed to social justice. It supports and advances social work practice as well as examines the lives of those who are socially marginalised and the structures that exclude them (McLaughlin 2007). There are many crossovers with other forms of research and social work draws from other disciplines, but social work research is distinctive because it must serve a practical purpose by speaking directly to policy or practice (Butler 2002). Dominelli (2005) argues that some of the distinguishing characteristics of social work research are having an orientation towards change, egalitarian relationships and a holistic engagement with the social 'problem' being researched.

Understanding people's experiences and views within their context is central to effective social work (Haight, Kayama, and Korang-Okrah 2013). Similar skills such as empathy and intuition, engagement with different cultures, observations and interviews are used both in ethnography and social work practice (Archer 2009). As a social work researcher, I recognise the connection between the skills that I used as a practitioner and those as a researcher. In the following quotation, the authors argue that ethnography is a particularly appropriate methodology for social work research:

Social work is the act of using practitioner perceptual capacities to gather – seeing, hearing, thinking, and feeling – the contextual data relevant to a client's situation. Enter ethnography. Of the three cognate disciplines that social work has heavily drawn upon – anthropology, sociology, and psychology – it is anthropology's case-based emphasis and ethnographic method that fits with our need to theorize the particular-in-context. The need for context-dependent knowledge requires research and practice methods that produce and disseminate such knowledge. Ethnography produces empirically rich case studies of complex social problems, sheds light on contradictions in social policy, attends to change across multiple scales of human action, and assists in the process of translating theory-to-practice. (Hoersch et al. 2014: 4)

The argument is twofold. Social workers use the same skills for ethnographic research as they do in their professional practice and are grappling with the contextualisation of theory into practice. Social 'problems' that social workers seek to address through relevant theories must

be understood in their context. Furthermore, social work is relevant at a global level. For example, Orr and Jain (2015) argue that a social work perspective would benefit Global Mental Health knowledge because it brings a much-needed emphasis on empowerment, participation and social perspectives. Social work emphasises embedded knowledge which is essential for global responses to social problems.

My study is social work research because it explores the lives of women who are marginalised, and I seek to understand their situations in order to make informed suggestions to practitioners and policy makers to bring about positive changes. Being a social work researcher affected the way I carried out the research. I was mindful of its need to be helpful for practice, the transferable skills that I employed and the orientation towards social justice. Understanding post-colonial theory was essential because it was formed as a response to profound injustice.

Theoretical Influences

Post-Colonial Theory

There is no one post-colonial theory. It is a broad church, with a long history. However, it can generally be defined as the debate on colonial power and the struggle against it (Dryzek et al. 2008). Key components are the effects of imperial power, relationships within those power struggles and giving 'voice' to groups whose power has been diminished. Inextricably linked to post-colonial thought is Edward Said and his ground breaking book 'Orientalism' (Mazlish 2005). Said (1978) argued that the 'West' painted a patronising picture of the 'Orient' as backward and primitive. This representation was highly political. It aided the justification of imperialism and the expansion of power. Key to his theory and particularly relevant to social research is the notion of 'othering', which depicts people of non-European descent as essentially different and lacking humanity. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) argues that central to the post-colonial struggle has been to assert the humanity of those who have been dehumanised. The response of the researcher should be to understand the intersecting and multiple layers of the struggles. She argues that research should portray positive identities and show that 'meaningful, rich, diverse, interesting lives are lived in the margins; these are not empty spaces occupied by people whose lives don't matter' (205).

Research often assumes that ideas and knowledge of the Global North are superior to other forms of knowledge (ibid). Said (1994) argues 'The great imperial experience of the past two hundred years is global and universal; it has implicated every corner of the globe, the colonizer and the colonized together' (259). Feldman (2001) calls for caution when considering patriarchy and the rise in women's labour in Bangladesh. There has been a universalist response that assumes one type of patriarchy and celebrates women's involvement in the labour force because it privileges notions of autonomy and self-reliance. Instead, the context and social relationships should be the starting point of understanding women's lives. Feldman's position privileges women's knowledge over global rhetoric.

For my research, having an understanding of post-colonial theory was important because of the history of both Bangladesh and of social research. Bangladesh has a colonial past, first ruled by the British and then for a short period by Pakistan. There continues to be 'imperial influences' such as multinational companies, global politics and international organisations, which affect the lives of participants. Their choices and experiences exist within these global power structures. It was important that I understand these influences to avoid simplistic and ethnocentric views. The roots of ethnography are in the discipline of anthropology, which was used by the British Empire to study colonial societies (Fielding 1993a). The history of 'othering' research participants should not be repeated. For my research, I am mindful not to portray women as the powerless 'other', and to respect and authentically portray their world view. In its struggle against male oppression, there has been a particular danger of feminist research to oversimplify women's positions.

Feminist Research

There is no one feminist methodology but there are a number of characteristics that define feminist research. Stanley (1983) argues that feminist research studies the conditions of women in a sexist, 'malestream' and patriarchal society. It is a response to gender inequality, holding the belief that women have less power than men and seeking to improve women's positions (Devault 1996). It highlights sexist practices that lead to an unequal social order (Sarantakos 2005). Devault (1996) argues that there are three distinctive characteristics of feminist methodology: it focuses on the women's perspective, minimises harm and control in the research process and seeks to bring about change for women. Arguably ethnography is

particularly suited to feminist research because it requires a closeness to participants and focuses on understanding the world from their point of view. In contrast the ethical challenges of working with such closeness and unequal power relationships have been highlighted (Devault, 1996). Intimate relationships can be exploitative, boundaries are easily blurred and contact over a long period of time, often in private spaces, make full consent difficult.

A central but much debated concept of feminist research has been the rejection of traditional notions of objectivity and the need to be a distant 'scientific' observer in social research. Oakley (1981), based on her research with new mothers, argued against the goal of an interviewer to be an objective collector of data. Instead she said that trusting relationships should be built up. As a female researcher, she argued that she had a shared sense of 'sisterhood' and friendship with her participants. Thirty years later Oakley (2016) revisited her research. She reflects on criticism that her notion of friendship in research ignored the differences between women, power imbalances and the ethical conundrums that arise. Oakley recognised the naivety of her view of 'friendships' and re-conceptualised the notion of participants gifting their time to researchers. When participants choose to answer questions or give their time, this is a form of 'gift' to the researcher. She argues that it is patronising to say that participants are not able to make the decision to participate. Oakley's understandings of the research process illustrate both the shift in understanding research due to feminist thought and its complexities.

Intersectionality is a concept that has gained much attention over the past three decades (Carbado et al. 2013). Kimberly Crenshaw (1989) introduced the term in her ground breaking essay, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine'. Crenshaw, rooted in critical race and black feminist theories, showed how resistance movements such as feminism and antiracism legitimised and produced marginalisation through separating the concepts of racism and patriarchy. Intersectionality understands that individuals are in power structures that intersect; a black woman experiences both racism and sexism, and these are not separate from each other. In a later article Crenshaw (1991) describes how antiracist groups hid or denied the existence of domestic violence in their communities because of concerns of their communities being negatively portrayed. At the same time, feminist groups did not consider the specific needs of women of colour, emphasising the 'universal' experience of domestic violence and privileging the 'white' experience. She

demonstrates how both groups marginalised women of colour and argues that taking an intersectional approach provides of a way of understanding the different aspects of women's experiences.

Intersectionality has been used by different disciplines and can be applied to various situations (Carbado et al. 2013). It is a useful, adaptable tool and can be applied to many categories such as class, nationality or any marginalised group of people (Crenshaw, 1991; Cho, 2013). Cho (2013) states:

Recognizing that both power and identity are complex and interrelated, intersectionality offers a systemic and structural analysis of both, while recognizing the variability, fluidity, and contingency of specific manifestations of subordination.
(385)

The changing nature of power and identity is something that both Crenshaw and Cho have highlighted as particularly important. These are not fixed structures. Intersectionality is an important concept to apply to women in my research as it takes into account their multiple identities and the affects these have on their positions.

I have been influenced by feminist theories and research throughout the research process: reviewing the literature, planning data collection, conducting the direct research and analysing the data. At its core, my research explores women's lives and their position within society with the hope of it contributing to their enhancement. The participants had multiple identities and notions of intersectionality were key to understanding their lives.

Field sites, Access, and Participants

My research questions led me to explore the lives of two, overlapping, groups of women who I accessed in different places and through different gatekeepers. The purpose of my research was to look at how low income urban employment affected all aspects of women's lives and the communities that they lived in. I, therefore, chose to begin my research by living in an area of low income, commonly referred to as a *bosti*. While planning my research, I realised that gatekeepers would be essential for access. Rasid (2007), who also carried out research in a Dhaka *bosti*, found that her gatekeepers were vital. People initially did not engage with her until she formed relationships with well-respected and liked health workers local to the area. These relationships helped her to gain trust and acceptance from the community. Before going to

Bangladesh, I identified an organisation that agreed to act as my gatekeeper.

I chose to use the Bengali word *bosti* rather than its common translation, slum, because of the connotations that the word 'slum' holds. I recognise that the word *bosti* has similar negative meanings connected to it. However, it is the term that my research participants used. They referred to densely populated areas of one room dwellings as *bostis*. I lived in a room in a *bosti* for four to five days a week for a total of ten months over the period of a year. I was initially there from February to March 2016. I then had to leave Bangladesh due to visa restrictions and stayed in the UK for two months because of illness. I returned from June 2015 to February 2016 but spent December out of the area. To complete my research, I needed to investigate the subgroup of women in low income employment, women who sold sex. I had originally planned to access them through my first research site because I knew that women in a nearby area sold sex. I wanted to try and access this group without going through an NGO because of the dominance of NGO involvement in research on women who sell sex. However, I was unable to do so due to the stigma attached to this group of women and their social isolation. I made contact with women who sold sex through the Sex Workers' Union in one area of Dhaka and two other NGOs in a different part of the city. I carried out research with the second group of participants over a period of six months from November 2015 to April 2016.

Over the course of my fieldwork I met with many different people including women, men and children. For the purpose of this research, I define my research participants as women and teenage girls who either worked or had worked in low income employment and who discussed their work and life experiences with me. Table one shows that I spoke to sixty-one participants (twenty-one of them were selling or had sold sex) and I talked to thirty-six of these participants several times (eleven of them were selling or had sold sex). Furthermore, I carried out two short group interviews after a school meeting work with eleven participants; all but one of the participants were unknown to me. Therefore, my research includes seventy-one participants according to my definition. However, I recognise that this is largely an arbitrary number.

The group interviews at the school only lasted for fifteen minutes and the women involved provided small snippets of opinions. Nevertheless, I found them interesting and useful, so I included them. On the other hand, I spent hours with many children, met a handful of women

who did not earn an income and spoke to a small number of men. All these actors provided me with different levels of insights, from the minor to the profound, but whom I have not counted as official 'participants'. My reason for not doing so is that they were not the focus of my research. Furthermore, it would be almost impossible to count every person whom I encountered and decide whether their contribution was significant enough to be counted as a 'participant'. I decided that it was important to include the numbers of those that I have defined as participants to give a rough overview of where the bulk of the data that I used came from.

	Participants from First Research Site	Women who Sell Sex	Total
Several Meetings	25	11	36
One Meeting	25	10	35
Total	50	21	71

Table 1: Number of research participants

Audio recorded Interviews	Participants from First Research Site	Women who Sell Sex	Total
Individual Interviews	8	6	14
Group Interviews	2 (11 participants)	3 (13 participants)	5 (24 participants)
Total	10 (19 participants)	9 (19 participants)	19 (38 participants)

Table 2: Number of audio recorded interviews

First Group of Participants and Research Site

My gatekeeper to the first site of research was a Bangladeshi man who ran an NGO. This organisation provided schools for children in the area who are unable to access government schools. I have called him *Mama* (maternal uncle) my whole life and I had visited the area several times before deciding upon it as my field site. He is well known and trusted by the community. This relationship provided me with access and an identifiable connection to a group

of people relevant to my research. In many ways my uncle was an 'insider' in this community. He was the same ethnicity as participants, visited the area regularly and had worked closely with the community since 2008. He was respected and often called upon when there were crises. My relationship with him provided me a form of bonding social capital. It meant that participants accepted me, I had an identity and participants wanted to show their respect for my uncle through their care of me. However, he was also an 'outsider' because he was middleclass and Christian, which made my relationship with him more believable.

My uncle organised a room for me to rent from one of the families with whom I also ate in the evenings. His NGO ran a small school behind my home which had classes up to year three. Once children completed their first three years of school, they were financially supported to attend a local formal school. Most of the children in the area received their education through this NGO. The NGO had an office half an hour away when travelled to by a combination of foot and shared CNG (auto-rickshaw run by compressed natural gas) that worked as a bus service. I went there most week days to read, type up my fieldnotes and assist the NGO with administrative tasks.

Having this routine provided me with a recognisable role and purpose. My neighbours knew that I worked at the NGO and I would often travel with one of the NGO's employees. Most women worked during the day and it was therefore evenings when I would spend time talking, working on saris, or watching the TV with them. While this routine gave me credibility and a clear identity, I recognised the importance of carrying out observations at different times in the day. I spent several work days in the neighbourhood. There was a small garments factory in my area and a t-shirt printing factory ten minutes' walk away. I visited both these factories. I spent two or three nights a week in a completely different neighbourhood with my family. This allowed for me to have time away from the field site and made sense to participants as it is the norm for individuals to live with their family unit. Several members of my family visited me while I conducted my research, which aided in establishing and legitimising my identity. People would ask after members of my family. As strange as I was, it was another point of common reference. The nights that I spent away were usually over the weekend, but I spent several weekends in the research site to observe life on these days.

My room was in a line of brick rooms called *galis* with a tin roof and two shared toilets and washing area at the end (see image 1). There were four rooms on each side facing each other. Most of the other rooms had families of three to four people living in them. One had a group of four single men who were asked to leave the room half way through my time and then a larger family (two parents and four children living at home) expanded into their room. On this side of the neighbourhood most the *galis* were brick structures and on the opposite side the homes were made entirely out of tin. This neighbourhood was built on land that was slightly lower than the surrounding land which was most noticeable when there was heavy rain and the area would flood. The group of homes on my side did not have water enter them while the homes across from us did. However, everyone had to wade through the water to get home during a flood which would typically last a few hours, though it could be longer depending on the intensity of the rain.

In the middle of the neighbourhood was a rubbish dump. There were some homes that were built over it, but most was uncovered. The rubbish dump could smell unpleasant, attracting mosquitos, but it was also an open space where children played. A makeshift room was made with sack cloth and bamboo where men played *carrom*, a popular board game. The area was surrounded by high rise flats as well as areas of similar housing. I was told that the land belonged to several brothers. Those living in tin homes paid roughly 2000tk (£19.23) per month and rent for the brick homes was 2500tk (£24) per month. The majority of houses had a large bed, stove, and cupboards in them.



Image 2: My housing in research area



Image 3: Housing in the research area opposite my home



Image 4: Research neighbourhood



Image 5: Research neighbourhood during flooding

If a person is older than you, has a higher social status or is unfamiliar, using their name is considered rude. Even when you address someone on the street, unless they are clearly significantly younger than you, family terms are used. I called most women in my research area *apa* (big sister). If a woman looked considerably older than me or had adult children, I would address her as *kala* (maternal aunt). I, therefore, knew very few of the names of the women in the community where I lived. When referring to other women, we called them the name of their oldest child's *ma* (mother) and when referring to men, the oldest child's *baba* (father). In my notes, I refer to most people in this way because this is how I think of them and I find it the most comfortable way of referring to them in all my writing. I use pseudonyms for names in all the data presented to protect the anonymity of the participants due to the sensitive nature of the research topic. I will discuss this further in the ethics section of this chapter.

Second Group of Participants and Research Sites

The sub-category of women in low income that I was researching were women who sold sex. I knew that there were women who sold sex in the wider area of the first research site and heard rumours of girls or women who may have sold sex during this part of my research. However, due to the stigma associated with the sale of sex and the social isolation experienced by this group of women, I was unable to access enough participants for my research and it was difficult to talk about issues openly. Therefore, I had to initially access this group of participants through NGOs. I decided not to live in the areas where sex workers lived for a number reasons. The first was that I did not have strong enough contacts in these areas. It would have been difficult to organise without having someone I knew well and trusted to assist me in making arrangements. Furthermore, there were security concerns during the time of my fieldwork. There was a rise in

Islamist extremist activity. Secular bloggers, religious minority groups and foreign nationals were being targeted and several had been murdered. I did not have as strong connections to the areas where women who admitted to selling sex lived as I did in the first site of research and therefore decided that it would be unwise to live in one of them. Furthermore, while it would have been beneficial, I did not feel that it was strictly necessary. The participants in this second group lived in very similar housing to the first group and came from the same socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, I had a background context of what every day urban life looked like for women.

The purpose of the second part of my research was to focus on one particular group of women in low income employment who, due to the stigmatised nature of their identity, had different experiences of urban work. I was able to do this through visiting them in their homes and places of work. I met women who sold sex or had sold sex, many of whom called themselves sex workers, in two areas of Dhaka, one in the north and one in the south. Unlike the first group of participants, I refer to this group by pseudonyms of their first names because they introduced themselves by their names. In this way they were different to the first group due to my meeting them outside the context of their wider families and because they were more likely to be involved with NGOs which used first names.

In the northern part of Dhaka, I had contacts with NGOs because of my previous work as a social worker for a project in the area. I met with six participants in this area. Sex was sold from a *mazar*, a shrine for a Muslim saint, in the area. The *mazar* is a large religious site with the main shrine situated in the middle and walls with shops surrounding it. The site attracted a large number of devotees each day but was also a place of refuge for the marginalised of society. There were many disabled people, individuals suffering from mental illnesses, and mothers with young children who begged for money within the courtyards. Giving alms was a common practice of the devotees and the *mazar* gave out free lunch. Because of these benefits, many people went to the *mazar* when they were destitute. I met one participant who was homeless and lived at the *mazar*. It was an area known as a point of contact for the sale of sex and for trafficking. Women would line up along the side of the street just outside the *mazar* with flasks of tea. They would initially sell the tea and then use this platform as a way of contacting men for the sale of sex. An NGO worker introduced me to a former sex worker who described taking

women to India to sell for the purpose of prostitution. She said that she had been a sex worker for many years before taking on this role. I visited the *mazar* with two NGOs on two separate occasions and then went back myself several times. I met a participant at one of the NGO offices and recorded her story. The NGO worker then took me to the home of a woman who sold sex. I later saw both participants several times at the *mazar*. Through the same NGO I met Parul at the *mazar* who ran a stall. She had been a sex worker for several years before being employed by an NGO. When the NGO lost its funding, they helped her set up the stall that she was working at when I met her. I met with Parul at the *mazar* and she took me to her home.

I contacted a feminist NGO which I knew had done work with sex workers. Workers from this organisation introduced me to a sex workers' network who invited me to the rehearsal of a drama about women's rights. At the rehearsal, I met Banu who was acting in the drama. She was a middle-aged woman who identified herself as a former sex worker. She had worked for an NGO for several years but lost her job due to funding cuts. She sat next to me and asked me about the research that I was doing. She showed me pictures of her daughter and invited me to her home. She told me that she wanted to assist me with the research and was instrumental both for the insights that she provided and for accessing other participants. Banu lived in the south of Dhaka. I visited her home many times and she introduced me to fourteen other women who sold sex. I recorded several individual and two group interviews at her home. She took me to the homes of three women who lived in the same neighbourhood as she and I recorded a group interview in one of their homes. Banu's home was a hub for a community of women who referred to themselves as sex workers and lived in the area. I therefore met a number of the participants numerous times when I was visiting her. Two of the participants lived with Banu. The largest train station in the city was the primary area where the sex workers that I met through Banu made contact with their clients. I visited this station both with Banu and by myself.

Data Collection Methods

I have categorised my data gathering into different types: participant observations and individual and group recorded interviews. However, these categories imply a distinction which is only partially true. During the entire process of gathering data I was spending time with people, observing their day-to-day activities, and asking questions about their lives. Some of these conversations were captured on audio recording devices, but the vast majority were not. In my

fieldnotes, I included informal conversations that struck me as relevant, dialogues of life stories and responses to questions about experiences. These fieldnotes made up the bulk of the data that I used. It was beneficial to have the audio recordings because they allowed me to analyse the narratives and specific words used by participants in more detail. In my fieldnotes, I described observations at the time of audio recorded interviews that could not be captured in recordings.

Participant Observation

Through participant observation I addressed the second part of my research question which explores the 'social context of urbanisation and the changing role of women'. I looked at the third and fourth sub-questions: 'How do women interact with their communities?' and 'How have wider demographic, societal and cultural changes for urban women affected the situation of women selling sex?' It was necessary to begin with this part of the question in order to gain the contextual understanding for the other questions. It is essential for ethnographic research to begin by trying to understand the field setting (Agar, 1996). Spending time with participants and their families, participating in meals, local events, and celebrations, gave me the opportunity to learn how individuals and families interact in a low-income community. I observed working women's roles, living situations and work places. Through informal conversation, I learnt about attitudes towards women's work, selling sex and sexuality.

During my time conducting fieldwork, I attended weddings, a circumcision ceremony and birthday parties. I participated in religious fasting, the breaking of the fast and Eid celebrations. I watched TV and worked on saris with women. I drank tea and ate snacks at the local tea stalls. I watched reactions to a woman's return from Lebanon, witnessed family conflicts and displays of affection. I asked questions about day-to-day life and discussed belief systems and disagreements regarding these. I visited two factories that were places of work for participants. They were both small businesses hiring less than a hundred people. A participant who worked in a larger factory asked whether I could visit her place of work, but I was not given permission. One of the factories that I did visit was on the edge of the area I lived in and the supervisor showed me around. I visited the other factory with a child who was taking lunch to her mother who was an employee of the factory and a participant of my research.

I spent less time with the second group of participants. However, I did ensure that I visited women's homes and places of work several times. I observed and participated in informal activities through spending time at Banu's home where groups of sex workers would sit around and discuss everyday concerns, conflicts between friends, memories and numerous other topics. They told stories and shared food, memories, and jokes. This provided me with a wider context to their lives and taught me about how they interacted with each other. I visited the two main areas where women sold sex several times over six months, at different times of the day and on different days of the week. I observed how women instigated contact with clients, how they interacted with each other and with other individuals. I had informal conversations with women as they were preparing to work.

I kept a record of my observations and conversations in my fieldnotes which I wrote every day that I carried out observations. I described events, people, conversations, my impressions and feelings (Fielding 1993a). I often hand wrote these in the evening and would type them up in the NGO office the next day. I would then go through my fieldnotes, writing reflective notes in the margins. Additionally, I wrote memos, as suggested by Charmaz (2006) on issues, ideas or questions that were persistently coming to my attention. The personal engagement in ethnographic research makes it difficult to have the level of detachment which is often assumed as necessary for research. It was important that I could justify my findings and that they would be recognised if another researcher visited my field sites and engaged with my research participants. To ensure the validity of my research I was careful to record my data clearly and I spent an extended amount of time with people in their spaces. I did not take information at face value but questioned and sought social consensus on the information that I was given whenever it was possible (Fielding 1993a).

Recorded Interviews

The first interviews that I recorded took place in the first research site with two group interviews with mothers at their children's school after they had attended one of the 'guardians' meetings' which were regularly held to discuss their children's education and concerns regarding their communities. I asked these women questions about the types of work that they were involved in, what they thought of women's work, and the changes that they saw because of women's work. The recordings only lasted fifteen minutes because the participants were busy and had

already sat through an hour's meeting. I considered not including these recordings as data but did use the information that I gathered from them. I had known the participants for six months and had been living in the area for four months by the time I recorded the individual interviews. This gave me time to build up trust and a rapport with the participants. It was difficult to find time and space to record interviews with the first group of participants. Their doors were always open, and people were constantly in and out of their homes. I described my first recorded interview in my fieldnotes:

I asked Laily's ma if I could ask her questions and record them for my research. She agreed but we had several interruptions. The children came in and wanted to know what was happening and what the recorder was. Manik's ma came in and said that she didn't want to live anymore. Mohima's ma also came in and joined in the conversation at one point. We were interrupted by the children spilling food all over my room and Jasmin's husband coming to beat up the man who was meant to have had an affair with Jasmin. The TV was on for at least half of the interview. However, I got about 40 minutes recorded of Laily's ma talking in four separate parts. (Fieldnotes)

This was the most chaotic of all my interviews but illustrates the challenges faced when conducting these interviews. Children and neighbours would interrupt; there were constant noises and things happening in the area. People lived in such close proximity that this was impossible to avoid. Despite these challenges I was able to record the stories of eight women from my first research site. These were the participants with whom I spent the majority of my time, apart from one of my direct neighbours who asked not to be recorded.

Recording interviews with participants from the second part of my research was in many ways more straightforward. They had been introduced to me as a researcher who wanted to learn about their lives. Unlike the first group of participants, I had not formed relationships with them over a long period of time before conducting the interviews. They were more likely to be involved with NGOs who were interested in recording their life stories and, consequently, what I was doing was less strange to them. It was also clear that I knew they sold sex, which encouraged them to talk about this stigmatised part of their lives freely. I did meet half of them several times and in different places to gain a fuller picture of their lives, rather than simply the story that they told me during the recordings. I recorded one individual interview at an NGO drop-in centre but otherwise they were all recorded in women's homes.

I began each interview by explaining that I was recording their stories for my research and that I would not use their names, and I asked for their consent. I asked the participants to tell me about their lives from their childhoods and about their experiences of work. I then allowed them to tell me their stories with little interruption except to ask questions to clarify information that they gave me or to prompt further discussion (Sarantakos 2005). Both the individual and group interviews followed this format. O'Reilly (2009) highlights how useful group interviews are for research, stating that they provide rich data and encourage discourses on issues beyond personal narrative. This was certainly the case for the second group of participants. While they would tell me their individual stories in turn, they also encouraged each other, added information and discussed issues that they faced. When there are shared experiences in a group, individuals can feel comfortable to discuss experiences that they would not in an individual interview (Fielding 1993b). The group experience was particularly important for sex workers because of their stigmatised status.

Transcription and Translation

I recognise that language occurs within social context and is not a neutral reflection of the world (Wolf 2007). Language constructs and creates meaning. Wolf (2007) argues that translation must be understood as embedded in cultural settings and social understandings. It is therefore important that I am reflective in how I undertook the processes of translation. I have not been formally educated in Bengali and, therefore, my literacy skills in the language are poor. I can read Bengali script slowly. However, I initially felt that it would be important to have transcripts, so I employed a postgraduate student from Dhaka University to transcribe all the recorded interviews. Transcripts cannot capture everything that happens in an interview and there will always be possibilities of error (Ross 2010). I found listening to the recording directly more useful than reading through the transcripts but found them helpful for cross referencing.

To analyse the data, I listened directly to the recordings and looked at the transcripts to check words or phrases that I thought I have misheard. As I listened to the recordings, I translated the parts that I thought were particularly significant and summarised the rest. I acknowledge that this was a process of interpreting the data according to my understanding of the social context and the importance that I placed on information that I was hearing (ibid). It was part of the process of analysis, looking for repeated words or phrases and prominent themes.

Analysis

As is common with qualitative research, one of my main challenges with analysis was organising and interpreting the vast volume of data generated (Gibbs 2007). Throughout my time gathering data, I was actively engaged in the process of analysing it (Sarantakos 2005). O'Reilly (2009) calls this a spiral approach to analysis, where the researcher searches for patterns and themes in the data, compares them to theory and then returns to their data. During my time gathering data, most days I typed out my fieldnotes which were primarily descriptive. To organise my data and begin the analysis process I followed some of the methods suggested by Charmaz (2006) such as line by line coding and writing memos while I was conducting fieldwork. I read through my fieldnotes and inserted notes that recorded my impressions, questions and codes that I saw emerging (ibid). I wrote separate notes in a journal and typed memos to piece some of these thoughts together (Charmaz 2006; Gibbs 2007). I found the clearly structured guidance on how to organise and interact with my data extremely helpful. However, I did not continue to follow the grounded theory methods suggested by Charmaz because for the reasons outlined earlier in the chapter.

When I returned from field research, I put the fieldnotes and translated transcripts or summaries into NVivo. As I read through the data, I created nodes (NVivo codes) that were prominent and relevant. I then printed these codes as categories of data and read them several times to hone down broad categories. I searched for themes and patterns through finding subjects that continuously presented themselves, identified specific data that demonstrated these themes and then compiled an outline of what these themes were and how they related to each other (Fielding 1993b; O'Reilly 2009). I looked at particular events or words spoken to me and related them to the broader context of many observations and conversations. I separated parts of the data that illustrated themes and patterns that were emerging as prominent and was able to make small scale generalisations (Sarantakos 2005). I considered where my data fit in the literature and theoretical frameworks which enabled me to position and challenge my findings (Hoek 2014). My research questions were the basis for the analysis as they provided a guide to the subject that I was trying to understand as well as the relevant academic work that I placed my findings within (ibid). With these questions and theoretical knowledge as a context, I sought to conceptualise my empirical data.

Ethics

The research that I undertook and the methods that I utilised involved numerous ethical issues that I had to carefully consider and grapple with. Each research project is unique but there are general guidelines that should be followed. To achieve an ethical approach the researcher must think through responsibilities, obligations and relationships (Harper 2014). Qualitative research involves complex relationships where private and professional boundaries can become blurred (Ryen 2011). Ryen argues that understanding local context rather than assuming a universal application of ethics is key to morally responsible research. However, there are institutional guidelines that have to be followed. I completed the University of Edinburgh's ethical procedures before beginning my field research (Appendix 1).

I followed the definition from O'Reilly (2009) of ethical ethnography. She states that it, 'attempts to avoid harm to, and respects the rights of, all participants and to consider the consequences of all aspects of the research process' (57). While all social research should share these aims, ethnography's length of contact and ongoing relationships with participants, as well as its depth and detail of information, do result in its own particular ethical challenges. The focus on portraying the participants' points of view and forming in-depth relationships arguably results in ethnography being a particularly ethical approach. Equally, more intimate relationships throw up unique ethical challenges such as blurred boundaries and expectations. Furthermore, there is a colonial history of 'othering' in ethnographic research of which researchers must be mindful.

I do not use names and have not identified the specific areas that I conducted my research in because of the sensitive nature of the research. I explained to participants that information given to me would remain confidential. I include details of participants' lives that may seem to endanger their anonymity. I have chosen to include these details because it provides context and depth to understanding participants' lives and, due to participants' situations, does not risk their identities being revealed. Dhaka is a city of millions of people. There are hundreds of communities and thousands of streets just like the ones I describe. Therefore, the likelihood of anyone being able to identify the participants involved is extremely low.

The people that I interacted with lived in poverty and I have a significantly higher level of income than they do as well as access to far more resources. It was important that I was mindful of

power dynamics and how these affect relationships. With the history of colonialism and global inequalities there is a danger that the researcher-participant relationship can be exploitative. When planning the research, I asked myself the question: with the difference in power positions will participants feel that they are able to opt out of the research? Discussion by Rashid (2007) was reassuring on this subject. She describes how women made it very clear when they did not want to talk to her and many women refused to work with her. Essentially, ethical research must consist of respectful relationships with participants and knowing individuals well enough to discern whether they are willing participants in the research is key (Peled & Leichtentritt, 2002). There were women who declined to be part of my research in both groups of participants.

A related concern was that for the majority of the participants social research was a foreign concept. The culture of the academic global north has little relation to their lives and it is, therefore, debatable whether they would ever fully understand what my research is about and how it will be used. With this in mind, would the participants of this research be able to provide truly informed consent to take part? Explanations of my research and obtaining consent was an ongoing process. In the first research site, I knew all the participants and only asked questions when they were comfortable with me. In the second research site, I got to know some of the participants well but others I interviewed as soon as I met them. However, I ensured that they fully consented through the gatekeeper. She understood the research and all the participants knew her well. They made it clear when they did not want to participate. I did not ask for written consent as many of the participants were not literate and a written document would hold little meaning for them. Atkinson (2009) argues that conventional notions of 'informed consent' are particularly difficult for ethnographers to obtain because of the continuously engaged nature of the research. He places greater importance on the values held by the researcher and their relationships with participants rather than on simple rules for ethics:

We need to work to refine the collective sense of research protocols in terms that are driven by values rather than by procedures. For instance, many ethnographers spend a good deal of time developing trust with their hosts and informants. The promotion and development of such a positive interpersonal working relationship might provide a more anthropologically and sociologically informed basis for proper conduct than the notion of informed consent. Likewise, the establishment of social relationships in the field should be recognised for what it is—a process rather than an event that can be predetermined and inscribed within a single document. The extent of indeterminacy and unpredictability in field ought to be appreciated. (Atkinson, 2009: 25)

Taking this on board, I obtained 'informed consent' throughout the process of developing relationships and regularly reminded the people I encountered that I was doing research. I asked for verbal consent whenever I recorded an interview.

To illustrate the process of explaining my research project and gaining consent, the excerpt below describes an interaction that I had with one of the participants:

I said to Arif's ma, 'You know how I am doing research to find out about women's lives? I have started recording women's stories'. I asked whether I could record her story. I said that I would keep her identity confidential. She repeated the part I said about confidentiality. She said that she has lots of different stories. I asked her whether I could record her story and ask her some questions. She said that's fine but that she is too busy. I said that I could put the recorder on the floor while she chopped vegetables and she said that she was going to wash the pots, so I said that's fine. We talked about something else and then she said to me, 'Why are you doing this research?' I said to find out about people's lives, so others could know. She said, 'Oh, I thought that it might be to help us. We're poor people'. I felt terrible! I didn't feel that I could say that it would directly help her because I have no concrete evidence that it would, particularly for her life. We talked about something else and as I was leaving she said, 'You can record my story.' I said, 'Whenever you have time.' And she replied, 'Let's see if I'm off on Friday'. (Fieldnotes)

This description sums up many of my research's ethical dilemmas that occurred through the research process. One of my key participants told me directly that she would talk to me for the research, but she did not want to be recorded. However, generally I had to understand more indirect communication. Participants, like Arif's ma, said that they were 'busy'. Arif's ma did decide to give me a recorded interview but because of her initial hesitation I waited until she volunteered. A woman who sold sex said that researchers were useless because they did nothing to help people practically. Many women who sold sex had contact with researchers because of their involvement with NGOs. The response of the participants around this woman was interesting. They told her that I was an 'okay' person, had travelled to see them and that there was no harm in telling their story. I think they felt sorry for me. They were in their home where they felt comfortable and had invited me in. They 'gifted' me with their time and had chosen to do so (Oakley 2016). It was important to regularly have conversations about what my research meant and to hear participants discuss my role with each other. Through their conversations I could gauge what they understood and how they felt about the research.

Many women said that they wanted people outside their world to hear their stories, but they also

had immediate needs. I realise that I have gained much more from the research than any of my participants will. I know that I am indebted to them and their generosity. However, I wanted to ensure that I was never a financial burden and that I did contribute positively to the people that I was interacting with. Scanlon (1993) argues that 'telling people's stories' is important but that this does not take away individuals' immediate needs. She suggests doing practical tasks to help participants so that they gain something tangibly positive from the research. In the first research site, I volunteered with an NGO that provided education for most of the children in the area, I helped children with their homework and engaged with the community as much as possible. One participant regularly bought me tea when I visited her house. I knew that this was costly for her and she did stop when her family were going through financial difficulties. To try and repay her in a respectful manner, I bought her fruit when I visited her home. Similarly, at the second research site I took small gifts when I visited to thank the host for her hospitality, as is the custom in Bangladesh when one visits a home.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to self-reflection, self-criticism, and is based on the premise that the engaged field researcher is an active part of the setting, relationships, and interpretations. Knowing yourself and how you affect and are changed by the research enterprise are central to field research and, ideally, occur throughout the research process.(Crabtree and Miller, 1999:14)

Reflexivity is important because it is essential that the researcher recognises the effect that they have on the research, that they are integral to socially constructed situations within research and not an objective observer of it (O'Reilly 2009; Probst and Berenson 2013). The purpose should be to benefit the research, making it a more trustworthy depiction of its processes and findings (Probst and Berenson 2013).

I do not have Bangladeshi heritage but was born in Bangladesh and spent my childhood and adult life living in both Bangladesh and the UK. I trained as a social worker and have worked with various groups in both countries including sexually exploited girls and homeless women and children. My background and work experience have given me my interest in the research subject. They affected how I viewed and made decisions in each part of the research. I went into the research process with the necessary skills to respond to sensitive issues appropriately. However, I needed to be aware of how preconceived ideas and knowledge gathered from past

experiences influenced my perceptions on the subjects. As a social worker, I was used to being involved in people's lives through providing services. I had to be aware of the different role that I was embarking on as a researcher. In a social work role, one assesses needs and works towards providing services to meet those needs. As a researcher, I sought to understand situations and people.

Participants viewed me as an outsider and my foreignness was apparent. I was not from their community and had not lived their experiences. I had access to resources, education, travel, and the English language which are all associated with power and wealth. I remember the shock on a child's face when I told her that my family lived in more than one room, emphasising the differences in our levels of wealth. I was strange not only because of my ethnicity, nationality and class, but also because I was unmarried and living alone. Although this may have caused barriers in terms of not having certain shared experiences, it also lowered my status. Furthermore, people assumed that I was younger than I was and often wanted to look after me. Older women would explain things to me that they may not otherwise have felt the need to. Being a woman gave me access to women's spaces that are closed off to men. Women engaged with me with more intimacy because of my gender and talked about subjects that they would be unlikely to discuss with a man.

My identity, like many researchers, is complex and linked to various locations including Dhaka city (Davies 2008). Despite being very different to participants, I spoke their language, had family living in the city and family connections to the first site of research. I dressed like other women in the community. People commented on my ability to eat food that was usually not offered to foreigners or wealthy people. One woman said that she stays at home when it floods because she does not like wading through dirty water so was impressed that I was able to. I overheard people tell others that I was okay because their mother liked me, or I played with their children. However, some individuals refused to talk to me or avoided me. I did not push myself on people and they could easily choose to ignore me. One of the moments that I felt most part of the community was when I told a child off for misbehaving causing his mother to be furious with me, which sparked a communal debate on whether my behaviour was justified. I had become someone that people could tell off and fight with.

Who I am was both an advantage and disadvantage to my research. It opened some avenues of social interaction and closed others (Davies 2008). I had to work to be accepted and there may have been things kept from me because of my outsider status. However, speaking the language, knowing Bangladesh and the country being a major part of my life, connections to communities, and past experience with similar communities were all beneficial to being accepted by participants and helped me understand their lives. Furthermore, there were advantages to being someone to whom life had to be explained. I was able to ask simple questions. I was distant enough from the community that participants could tell me about aspects of their life that were considered shameful. Throughout the research process I tried to understand my position within it and reflect on how this affected my findings.

Summary

My research focused on the lives of women in low income employment, including sex workers, in Dhaka to address several gaps that I found in the literature. I took an ethnographic approach to gain an in-depth and holistic understanding of how work and social changes affect women's daily lives, their social interactions, and perceptions of their experiences. I explored the idea of using constructivist grounded theory and followed some of the steps laid out by Charmaz (2006) to analyse my data but did not agree with the notion of a single theory emerging from the data and therefore did not produce a grounded theory piece of research. My research is social work research because it explores the lives of a marginalised group with the intention of making its findings practically applicable. Post-colonial and feminist theories shaped how I approached and conducted my research. Bangladesh's colonial past and social researchers' history of 'othering' meant that it was vital that my research portrayed the complexities of women's lives. Similarly, it was essential to understand the disadvantaged position of women in order to comprehend their experiences. Concepts of intersectionality helped me view this in the wider context of other identities that marginalise groups and shape women's experiences.

I carried out my research in two parts. For the first, I lived in an area with a high number of women in different forms of low income employment. I built up relationships with participants, took part in day-to-day activities, and visited places of work. I wanted to understand the lives of women who sold sex. Therefore, for the second part of my research, I contacted two groups of women who sold sex through NGOs. I visited their homes and places of work. The data

collection methods I used were participant observations, individual and group interviews. I recorded some of these interviews, transcribed and translated them.

I analysed my data throughout the process of collecting it, searching for dominate themes and comparing these to the literature. Some of the key ethical challenges of my research were avoiding causing harm through the research, the unequal power relationships and ensuring participants' consent. I addressed these through maintaining confidentiality, building up positive relationships that ensured meaningful consent and engagement with the communities being researched. I recognise that my identity as someone outside their community, from a different class and ethnic background, created some barriers in relationships but also offered some opportunities to enhance the research. Through the research process, I was able to engage with communities that accepted me and generously gave me their valuable time and insights.

Chapter Four:

Women and their Communities

Introduction

What constitutes a 'community' is contested and context dependent (Dominelli 2006). It has been defined in various ways, including by occupation, religious affiliation, social class, shared ethnicity, and geographical areas (Mills 2004). While a community is often viewed as a group of individuals living within geographic boundaries, an alternative method of defining it is by individuals' bonds, belonging and similarities (Chappell et al. 2006). My focus is the people that form communities and the relationships between them (Mills 2004). The participants in the first part of my research lived in close geographic proximity and shared a common sense of belonging. They were tied together through day-to-day experiences, shared identities and often kinship, with roughly half having roots in the same rural village. The second group, women who sold sex, formed an identity-based community (Dominelli 2006). It was defined by their stigmatisation, which largely isolated them from the other communities that lived around them and communities that they had been part of in the past. However, interactions with these communities continued.

In this chapter, I argue that individuals in both groups made complex decisions both to conform to the norms set by their communities as well as to challenge them. Women found multiple ways of managing their places within these communities. Belonging and identity determined and directed the choices women made regarding their responses to their communities and how they negotiated their positions within them. I begin this chapter discussing the first group of participants, women in general low-income employment. I explore how these participants are part of their community's identity and how their place within their communities provides both belonging as well as restrictions. I then explore the identity and communities of women who sell sex. They were members of a particularly stigmatised group, which changed the formation of their communities and their responses to their social position. I conclude by arguing that participants manage their social positions in order to maintain their belonging within their communities while recognising the restraints placed on them and within these positions negotiate various ways of increasing their agency.

Women in Low Income Employment

Communities and Identity

A key part of the participants' identity was their social class. They all considered themselves to be 'poor people', though there were different levels of wealth within the community. The wealthiest family owned a brick home on the edge of the community. While others considered this family relatively well-off and they had a greater level of financial security than others, they considered themselves poor and were very much part of a low-income community. While the term 'class' was rarely referred to, the identity of being a poor person was a key part of belonging to their community. Participants directly contrasted this identity against people who were considered rich or important. The 'them', described as *boro lok* (literally means 'big people' and referred to rich or powerful people), were generally defined as people who lived in flats. Discussions were framed in the language of 'us' versus 'them'. Often the 'them', were held responsible for the suffering of 'the poor'. A social identity approach explains that groups contrast themselves with others outside their group as a strategy to promote their sense of belonging and a clear distinctiveness (Hornsey 2008). They divided the world into 'us' and 'them' as is typical of social groups. Participants recognised the social hierarchy that their community was part of and were critical of this.

People regularly described anger at being ignored by the government and a feeling that systems were unfair to them. Parvin's ma, a mother of two who supported her family through informal sari work and the little money that her husband contributed to the household, described how she felt the rich and those in authority should respond to people's poverty:

There is no end to the suffering we can talk about. With nothing... If those who have four or five houses would give to the poor. Everyone should have just one home. Everyone should have equal rights. Those who have, take five more, hitting the poor. If the government could make a law... why are four or five houses needed? The cost of rent is not what people can afford. (Individual Interview Transcript)

As Parvin's ma described, many people felt that those with wealth had a direct responsibility to respond to the needs of the poor. Parvin's ma referred to 'we', identifying herself with a group of people who have been treated unfairly. She connected the rich having a surplus that directly affected what resources that the poor could access. She used the expression, 'hitting the poor', as if their actions were forcefully taking away from, and harming, 'the poor'. Her idea of 'equal

rights' includes the numbers of homes you have. The responsibility was placed both on the government and those who have extra houses. Parvin's ma did not explain why having more than what is needed takes away from those who have not, but she assumed this to be the case.

Some participants spoke of relatives who had done well financially and had become *boro lok*. The most common method of increased financial status was making money abroad. Participants frequently talked about these family members with disapproval, expressing views that they do not fulfil their duties towards their families. One participant, Tamina's ma, complained that her relative owned several shops, but her husband had to rent shop space to run his mobile phone business. In my fieldnotes I describe her explaining why she felt that her relatives treated them unfairly:

Tamina's ma said that she and her husband both have family members who are *boro lok*. They have lots of money and around Eid time they give lots of people clothes. However, this is just for show. In the Quran, it says that you should first give to your poor relatives and give an amount that would actually help them. She said her aunt owns lots of shops, but her husband has to work in someone else's shop. She said that people have been killed trying to get the clothes that rich people are giving out. (Fieldnotes)

For Tamina's ma, her relatives had a responsibility towards her because she was part of their family. She justified her belief through references to the Quran. Her aunt's mistreatment of her is particularly highlighted by saying that she owns shops, the very thing that her husband needed. Because her aunt did not fulfil her duty towards them, they had to pay rent. She highlighted her aunt's insincerity by describing how the wealthy relatives of her and her husband give to the poor for show, directly contrasting this with their stinginess towards her. She finished with an anecdote that painted them even further as villains; people got killed when trying to get clothes that the rich give out. Not only was there insincerity in their giving, but they caused harm. Tamina's ma's depictions of 'the rich' concentrates on their negative behaviour and traits, which by default portrays her community 'the poor' in a more positive light (Hornsey 2008). Her family suffer as a result of their actions.

The way in which people understand their identity is closely linked to geographic spaces (Dixon and Durrheim 2000). An intrinsic part of what was defined as 'being poor' was residing in a *bosti*. My first research site flooded when there was a heavy rain, which happened often during the monsoons. The rain water filled many homes in the area and to get to the area during a flood

people had to wade through dirty water contaminated by the rubbish dump next to the path. People often complained about these difficulties and would move to higher ground when they could afford to. Eight to ten families shared the communal toilets and wash areas, where there were occasional conflicts. However, 'place-identity' was key to participants' understanding of themselves. People defined the 'us' as those who lived in *bostis*, and the wealthy 'other' as those who lived in apartment buildings. Outside these communities, there was stigma related to living in a *bosti*. Children described teachers in a mainstream school that they attended insulting them by referring to them as '*bosti* children'. Teachers blamed the children's disruptive behaviour in school on the fact they lived in a *bosti*, illustrating the negative connotations associated with geographical spaces.

While there was often a sense of 'us' verses 'them', at times individuals differentiated themselves from each other. Occasionally there were discussions about the perceived negative culture of a *bosti* by participants. This was one method individuals used to manage the class structures that they were in and the stigma that it carried. Parvin's ma is an example of a participant who distanced herself from others in the *bosti*. Her husband had a second wife and provided her with little financial support. A few years before I met her she had worked in a garments factory and rented a room in a building with other garments workers. Her daughter lived with her mother in their village home. She lived in a large building and rented a small room. She said the environment was much better than in the *bosti*. She described her room being small, but less people lived in each room (she had a room to herself) and she did not have to worry about it flooding. However, her main reasons for preferring its environment were not physical but social reasons. She said that the most positive aspects of the living situation were not having many men around, that people did not fight and that they behaved 'better'.

Her circumstances changed when her second child, who is disabled, was born and her mother died. She was no longer able to work outside her home and, therefore, had to move to cheaper accommodation, closer to her husband who increased the amount of financial support that he provided for her and their children. Parvin's ma described her concern for her daughter growing up in the environment of the *bosti*:

But nothing can be done. Everyone wants to live in a nice environment, but the reality is... if she (referring to her daughter) could live in a better environment, she could learn from that environment... love, manners... isn't that right? And staying

here you can see some people have a dirty mouth, pushing and shoving, swearing. If you don't mix with them, you don't learn. Do you learn in isolation? If you don't hear, you don't learn. What she hears, she will learn. Even if it is not ten things, it will be one. Listening to it for ten days, one day it will suddenly come out of her mouth. And if she doesn't hear it, she'll never learn it. But there's nothing that can be done. Even though I try, it doesn't work. Everyone wants to live well but it's not always possible. (Individual Interview Transcript)

Later in the same interview she said to me:

Now you're living here, that's fine. You're a big person and can control yourself. The way you're happy to be, that's how you'll stay. No one can force you to learn anything. What you say to me, I won't say that. But in her head, she hasn't got that. And if she was in a good environment there wouldn't be that pressure. If she doesn't hear, where's she going to learn from? The way I cook is how she'll learn to eat. Everywhere it's the same for children, the way their parents cook, that's how they learn to eat. Whatever, they bring from the market, that's what children learn, that way. (Individual Interview Transcript)

In these excerpts Parvin's ma explained to me that she was unable to live in the environment that she wanted to live in and that she was concerned regarding the effect that this would have on her daughter. As an individual, she lacked the power to choose where she wanted to live. While Parvin's ma felt anger towards those others outside the community (as illustrated in the first quote in this chapter), she equally desired for her daughter to behave in ways that did not tie her to the community. She wanted her to aspire to behaviour that she considered morally superior.

Parvin's ma attributed 'living well' to particular types of desirable behaviour. She talked about the dreams that she had for her daughter, and to achieve these dreams certain behaviour was acceptable. She wanted to prevent her daughter from taking on behaviours that would result in her being imbedded in the culture of the *bosti*. Parvin's ma felt that being a child, Parvin would be powerless to resist the influences around her, and in turn, she would be unable to prevent the negative effects from happening. The decisions Parvin's ma made to try to teach her daughter certain behaviours and to not take on attributes of the community around her was her method of managing their social class and the restrictions it produced. She demonstrates the complexities of individuals' identities. Parvin's ma simultaneously felt solidarity with her community and wanted to distance herself from it, in order to improve her daughter's social standing. Her response to a stigmatised identity was to distance herself from this social identity,

viewing others who shared her identity as *bosti* dwellers with characteristics different from her own (Snow and Anderson, 1987). Parvin's ma's desire to increase the status of her child by emulating the behaviour of another class was likely to be linked with the limited power her community possessed.

Community Response to Status and Power

A significant event illustrated how the community experienced and processed a shared tragedy together. It demonstrates how women responded to power inequalities related to their class and position as 'poor' people. A teenage girl said to be about seventeen or eighteen died. She had grown up in the community and had recently been married. She moved to the home of her in-laws in another part of Dhaka. When I first heard of her death, I was told that she had hung herself. Immediately my neighbours said that she was mistreated by her husband and in-laws. Over the space of a week, the community decided that they had murdered her. Her death was discussed and mourned by everyone I met during that period of time. The community shared their feelings of sadness and anger with me.

From the day it happened, people talked about how they could not believe that she would kill herself and praised her 'goodness'. By the end of the first week following her death, they were sure that she had been killed and had various pieces of evidence to back up their conclusion. They shared fond memories of her as well as proof that she was murdered. The evidence included pictures of her body that were distributed on Facebook. I described some of these interactions in my fieldnotes. Nazrin and Juma were sisters and were around sixteen and nineteen years old. They had both been friends with the deceased girl. Nazrin went to school, and Juma was married and worked in a garments factory. The following excerpt describes my interactions with them:

Nazrin called me over to her house to eat. She was obviously very upset about the girl who had died. She and Juma kept talking about her. They said everyone in the neighbourhood was crying. Nazrin hadn't seen the body. She said that she cried anyway and wouldn't have been able to cope if she saw the body. They described their neighbour and girl whom they grew up with as a beautiful and very good girl. They said that she had visited recently, and she used to often eat with their family and Laily's family (neighbours). Her family never had much food. Her father doesn't work and married twice. Her mother lives off sari work and is sickly. She was close to Juma's age, with just one year between them. They said that she was beautiful and fair, but her husband was short and dark, and Nazrin didn't like his face. He

made a good amount of money but would beat her if she ever asked for anything and spent it on other girls. They said that the husband and in-laws beat her and then hung her. They offered proof that she couldn't have done it herself because the ceiling was too high for her to reach. They said that it had been done in front of her one and half year-old son. There are pictures of the black bruises on her face from the beating. Her husband's family paid off her family (Nazrin says 1 lakh). Juma and Nazrin then started talking about how people with money can get away with anything and if there were better laws and the police followed them this wouldn't happen. The family of the girl who died can't bring a case against the in-laws because they don't have enough money. Juma said, 'the world runs on money'. (Fieldnotes)

The way Nazrin and Juma described their friend as beautiful and good, contrasted with their description of her husband as ugly and bad. They painted the picture of their friend as vulnerable and poor, while her husband had money and abused his power over her. The language that they used portrayed extremes to communicate a 'moral order' that was completely true and indisputable (Pomerantz 1986). I offered to introduce the family of the deceased girl to a legal organisation that provided free advice and services. Initially they appeared interested, but no one seemed to believe that it would make a difference and, as described in my fieldnotes, I heard several rumours of their daughter's in-laws giving them money to not contradict their version of events. I also heard that family members had been threatened. None of my neighbours blamed the family for not pursuing a case, or even for taking the money. They were viewed as having little power in the situation. The necessary ceremonies were performed without interruption. My neighbours described with distain how the deceased girl's mother-in-law cried and wailed when the body was brought for viewing to the neighbourhood. However, everyone went through the rituals without disruption. The anger that was commonly expressed echoed Juma's conclusion, that 'the world runs on money'.

This death represented an unjust situation that was recognised and owned by the community. The picture drawn was of goodness, weakness and poverty being ruled over, abused, and ultimately destroyed by the bad, strong, and rich. The language used to tell and retell this story left little room for an alternative interpretation and painted a clear picture of right and wrong (Pomerantz 1986). It seemed to be a metaphor for many aspects of the community's lives. The only resistance that was perceived as possible was that 'of the weak' (Scott 1985), recognising and sharing the sense of injustice. It was, however, a whole community who expressed these feelings to each other. As a collective they perhaps could have exercised more power than they

believed possible, but they did not act as a group and demand justice. When Nazrin and Juma talked about their friend, they described their family giving her food when she did not have enough. They collected and shared pictures as evidence that she was murdered. Even though they took these individual actions to counteract the injustice their friend faced, they did not believe that they could do more. Everyone I spoke to expressed the feeling that the situation was wrong but that changing it was impossible.

Over the week of the death there was an intense period of discussing and reflecting on it. Sometimes these contemplations became about wider questions of meaning and human value as illustrated from the discussion recorded in my notes below. Mohima was a ten-year-old girl who lived across from me. Her mother and brother both worked in a factory that printed t-shirts. I was visiting their home one evening:

Mohima's ma and brother came home at 10.30pm. They also talked about the death and how it was a murder. Mohima's ma said to me, 'Life has no value and life has lots of value.' I asked what she meant. She said that when a new baby is born the parents wrap them up in cloth with so much care showing that they are valued, and when someone dies they dress them in white cloth and put them in the ground. She said sometimes when she comes home from work she sleeps in peace, but when things like this happen it makes her feel terrible. (Fieldnotes)

Mohima's ma was reflecting on this profound philosophical question, because of the events that took place. A loved and valued human being was killed and placed in the ground with little consequence for the alleged murder. In the statement, 'Life has no value and life has lots of value' and the explanation Mohima's ma gives for it, she asserted that life has value because of the value placed on it by others. It simultaneously lacks value because of the limitations of there being any consequences for those who ended this life. When thinking of the details of power and how power is exercised, consider Mohima's ma's final reflection, that sometimes 'she sleeps in peace' and other times 'she feels terrible'. As much as this incident shook the community, normality continued. All women lived in this dual reality of having a certain amount of protection and belonging from their communities and this being limited due to the lack of power that community and they possessed.

These series of events illustrate the social status of the communities that women in low income employment belong, their positions as women within those communities and how they react to their positions. We see how communities, and women within them, recognise their

disadvantaged position and respond to it, by both taking small steps of resistance as well as by accepting their situation (Scott 1985). This interplay between resistance and conformity played a role in the lives of all the women I met but was manifested in more extremes in the lives of women who sold sex. The participants were part of communities that possessed a low status in society, and as women their social status was further reduced by their gender. Their behaviour was restricted and regulated. However, communities provided belonging and a certain level of protection for women that encouraged them to adhere to behavioural norms.

Belonging and Protection

Community Care

The death of the young woman and the collective anger that it generated brought the community together over a specific experience. There were various other ways that the community cared for each other. While a significant portion of the community were transient, there were many residents who had lived in the area for many years. Several of the more established families had kinship ties and came from the same ancestral village. Living in such close proximity resulted in intimate relationships. People were in and out of each other's homes and regularly took part in each other's lives. Neighbours watched TV together, women worked on saris together, and would borrow each other's things. They would take significant roles in each other's childcare. One mother took the responsibility for her next-door neighbour's young children when she moved abroad to work. They collectively invested in the area. At the end of my time, the neighbours across from me put their resources together to raise the land that their homes were built on to prevent their houses from flooding. The whole area put money together to raise the path that led to the homes.

The following excerpts from my fieldnotes describe how the community came together to support a family:

The *Kalu* (Maternal Aunt's Husband) Udoy's ma was lying on a bed in a room in Udoy's *gali* (row of rooms). He was a man who looked like he was in his late forties or fifties. He had a big metal frame on his leg; from his foot to just under his knee. There was a big scar on his leg where it had obviously been cut open and where there had been stitches. The accident had happened a year ago while he was fishing. He fell into the engine of his boat. He hasn't been able to work since it happened and has three children. We then went into Udoy's home and Udoy's ma talked further about the family's situation. They brought him to Dhaka because they

could feed him. His youngest son was also there. Uday's ma said that everyone has been supporting the family for the past year but could no longer do so. The family often goes hungry. She asked if *Mama's* (my uncle's) organisation could help with the children's schooling. They have three boys. The oldest is in class 7 and attends the school in an area outside Dhaka that we had visited. When people tell him that he needs to drop out of school, he cries. He is a very good student. They are thinking of coming to Dhaka. The *Kalu* could be assisted to set up a shop because he could sit in it and, that way, would not have to do physical work. The boys could go to school. I said that I would talk to my uncle about the boy's education. (Fieldnotes)

The organisation run by my Uncle provided education for most of the children in the area. Asking me to request for the boys to be sponsored in schooling was a way that the community were supporting this family. They took advantage of the different resources that were available to them. In work such as fishing there is very little security, and it is the care of family and community that sustains families when disasters happen. The care of the family also illustrates how urban communities can be extensions of rural communities. The rural village referred to was an area that a large percentage of the *bosti* were from and a place that I had visited. It was a couple of hours out of Dhaka and much of the land was being eroded by rivers, which was a major cause of people migrating to the city. The family told me that they would move to Dhaka because, unlike the village, people in Dhaka had money and were, therefore, able to support them. There was more scope for work that was not physical, such as running a shop. As Uday's ma points out, the community did not have a large amount of disposable income, but they were able to support this family for over a year and contemplate setting him up in business.

In many ways, the care provided for this family could be expected. They were looked after by mainly family members, who had a social responsibility towards them. However, there were others in the community who were cared for by individuals outside their families. There was a disabled woman whose husband had left her. She did odd jobs such as domestic work but did not earn enough money to support her two children. She could afford to pay the rent with her earnings but her other household costs were covered by neighbours providing her and her children with food and clothes. There were also times when people outside the community were looked after. During my fieldwork, a homeless woman who was clearly mentally unwell wandered into the area and was fed by the community. Though there were many examples of this community care that I witnessed, it is important to point out that women also complained to

me that their neighbours did not support them enough. There were expectations of care that were not always fulfilled.

These acts of caring and meeting each other's needs can be contrasted with descriptions of neglect and mistreatment from 'the rich'. Communities responded to their volatile positions by providing care for each other and providing safety networks. To belong to a community, certain behaviours must be complied to, which was central to the decision making of its members. Behaviours and actions were negotiated between individuals and the community in various ways. There were certain behaviours that were viewed as acceptable to a limited extent, but neighbours would intervene when seen as necessary. While all members of the community were subject to social controls, women and children who had less access to power were most closely scrutinised by its rules and the consequences of not adhering to social norms were much greater.

Protection from Violence

The interplay between power, control and social protection was apparent in women's experiences of domestic violence. Women openly discussed and joked about their husbands being violent towards them. On the two occasions I saw husbands attacking their wives, people intervened. The following excerpts from my fieldnotes describe how the community mediated a domestic violence situation:

I was sitting in my room at about 7.30pm when I heard a lot of shouting. I went out to the lane in front of my *gali* and there was a man and women shouting at each other in front of the shop. At first, I thought that it was an argument with the shop but then it became clear that it was between a husband and wife. I recognised the wife. She's probably in her 20s/30s and has children. As it got louder more and more people came to watch. The men seemed closer and more involved, though women also tried to intervene. I was stood with Nazrin at the end of Udoy's *gali* with his ma, Saad's ma and the woman who lives across from Udoy. All they could tell me was that it was a fight between a husband and wife. I briefly spoke to Saad's ma who said that she is still looking for work. At one point, someone was hit by a bamboo stick. I assume that it was the husband hitting his wife, but it was hard to see with all the people. There were people trying to protect her. I went over to outside my *gali*, where Tamina's ma, Nazrin's ma and Nila were standing. From there I could see the wife on the ground crying. Nazrin's ma said that the husband is very bad and kept ranting about how terrible he is. Tamina's ma said that her husband once hit her in front of her mother and her mother didn't say anything. When the man had gone inside, and the woman was outside crying surrounded by other women, a group of men marched into the situation and seemed to be going

into their home. Tamina's ma asked who they were. No one seemed to know but I heard someone say they were going to investigate/ judge the case. (Fieldnotes)

The description portrays just how public domestic violence can be. Those close to the woman saw it as their duty to protect her from being attacked by her husband, and the leaders of the community intervened. The rest of the neighbours viewed it as an event that could be watched. Private life was very public. Nazrin's ma was enraged by the situation and very vocal in her anger towards the husband. The incident reminded Tamina's ma of her own experience of domestic violence and the fact that her own mother did not intervene. Another neighbour, when describing the violence of her husband against her, said that she wished that she could beat him to show him what it felt like. Women recognised the injustice that they and other women faced in their experiences of violence from their husbands. They stated the unfairness of women facing violence. However, they did not conclude that violence was never justified.

I witnessed another incident in which a large group of the community intervened in a domestic dispute: the family of an abandoned wife attacked her husband. I was told that the husband had left her for another woman and was not supporting his wife or their child. Women who stood around witnessing the event called the husband a 'monkey' and said that he deserved to be punished. An older female relative of the man was in the centre of the action loudly defending him and encouraging his protection. Community leaders got involved to judge the situation. These incidents of community intervention in private life offer some explanation to women's compliance to behaviours that disempower them. In the first incident, the community became involved to protect a woman from violence from her husband. In the second, family provided a form of justice for a woman that was monitored by the community. In these incidents, women's communities met women's needs in active ways.

I witnessed members of the community intervening to protect children from their parents a number of times. I described one of these incidents in my fieldnotes below. Laily was a ten-years-old girl and Moni was four-years old girl. Moni's family were my immediate next-door neighbours and Laily's family lived next door to them. I was in Laily's home when the following incident occurred:

I then started doing sari work with Laily's ma. While we were working, and children were studying, Moni came running in crying. She jumped on the bed and ran

behind Laily. Moni's ma came in shouting at her, telling her to go back to their room. Moni was crying and said no. Laily and her ma both told Moni's ma not to beat Moni and protected her. They also encouraged Moni to go back to the room and said that her mother wouldn't beat her. At different times Moni's ma jumped on the bed holding the wooden stick that is used for cooking *dal*. She towered over Laily, who Moni was hiding behind, and hit Moni on the head. Moni cried most of the time but at one point she started laughing and everyone joined in, even her mother. This must have gone on for at least thirty minutes (not the laughing, but the chasing around with a stick). Eventually, Moni's ma was able to grab Moni and take her to their room. She locked the door and we heard crying from their room. (Fieldnotes)

I saw similar situations happen several times. Often the child would run to the neighbouring home or a neighbour would hear the child crying and come to intervene in the situation. Children belonged to the power structure that existed within the community and were even more susceptible to violence than women. Alongside their vulnerability came the community's role in protecting them. Usually the neighbour would prevent the mother from hitting their child until the mother calmed down. As in the example above, this did not always protect the child from violence, but it minimised the severity. As in domestic violence against women, the common view was not that children should not be physically disciplined but rather that the discipline should not be too severe.

Another incident occurred when Mohima, a ten or eleven-year-old neighbour with whom I spent a lot of time, was being disciplined by her mother for wandering around too far from home. The neighbours, including myself, got involved to stop her mother from hitting her, but there were also neighbours who walked past saying that Mohima deserved to be beaten and she does not act as a girl should. Her mother's justification for the severity of the punishment, was that places were more dangerous for girls than for boys and Mohima had to learn this lesson. She said, 'Can girls just go anywhere like boys?'. There seemed to be a consensus between the female neighbours who were present that this was an important lesson for her to learn. Mohima's ma was not stating whether this should be the case but acknowledging that this was the reality. The neighbours' sanctioning of her behaviour highlights an important aspect of community protection; it operates in certain boundaries of approved, often moral, behaviours.

Mohima's mother, and her neighbours, were trying to teach what was accepted as appropriate gendered behaviour. They may well have believed that Mohima should act in a certain way simply because she was female, but this was not the only reason. Her mother explained to me

that she was concerned about her safety. Mohima's ma worked long hours and encouraged Mohima to stay home and work on saris. She told me that she thought that Mohima was too young to be working but she weighed this up with the risk of her wandering the neighbourhood and possibly being sexually abused and felt that her being distracted by work was the better option. Mohima's ma actions may have often seemed harsh and unfair, and she recognised this herself, but she made considered decisions based on the heightened risk to female children. The vulnerability of girls and women to violence and the perceptions of how they should act or where they should go were intrinsically interlinked.

Community Control and Managing Perceptions

How the community perceived an individual's behaviour played a major role in shaping women's decisions. I recorded a group interview at a school, where I asked a group of women whether there were certain types of work women could not do. They said that women could do all types of work. I asked whether women could ride rickshaws as a form of employment. The answer was 'no' because people might think that they were bad. A woman from the group explained, 'One woman might go to do bad work and another to do good work, but people will think that they are both bad' (Interview transcript). In principle they may have believed that a woman can go where she pleases. However, she was stopped from doing so because it could compromise her reputation. Women's mobility was regulated by how others in the community would perceive them. I was told that there were more freedoms for women in the city than in rural areas. Women could go shopping, they commuted to work places, and some sold produce on the side of the road. However, there still needed to be a clear reason for a woman's presence on the streets and there were negative connotations connected to the 'streets'.

There were implications associated to women being outside their community area, particularly after dark. One evening I went to a different area with a group of young women at around 9 pm and returned just before midnight. The young women were sisters, Nila who worked in a garments factory and Nazrin and Jasmin who were teenagers and at school. We attracted a lot of attention from men on the streets. Several asked why we were out so late. These young women were confident in their response. They either ignored comments or if the person was known to them, they would explain that they were visiting a family member. As young women who either worked outside the home or left their area to attend school, they were used to the

attention. They did not seem fazed by it, which indicated just how common the scenario was. The effects of the negative attention were that these sisters either had to avoid going to places at certain times or found ways of managing situations when they were in those spaces. Their different management techniques included going places in a group, not reacting to men's negative comments and occasionally choosing to wear a *burqa*.

Not only did women and girls have to manage their own behaviour and movements in order to maintain a 'good' identity, they were also concerned with being considered a bad person by association as demonstrated by the following situation described in my fieldnotes:

Nazrin's ma reported that her daughters don't want to go to coaching because some of the other girls talk on the phone outside or go to other places afterwards (she was alluding to them having relationships with boys). She said that their guardians need to be careful with them and guide them properly. She said that even though her girls don't do these things, if the girls they hang out with do they will also be considered *karap* (bad). (Fieldnotes)

Talking on the phone was a common way for young women to connect with men outside their families. There were often arguments due to young women talking on their mobiles phones regarding who they were talking to and why. These phone conversations were a source of rumours. Several couples met and married through contact on the phone, commonly called 'miss-call marriages'. Individuals would phone random numbers until they found someone to form a relationship with, hence the name. However, this method of meeting people was frowned upon. Nazrin's ma saw the behaviour of the young women described in the above excerpt as immoral. Part of managing behaviour was not mixing with those who did not conform to accepted moral norms. Nazrin's ma viewed it as the responsibility of the guardians of young women to teach appropriate behaviour to their children. Societal norms had power over women because they could be excluded from their community if they transgressed from morally accepted behaviour. This extended to having associations with individuals who transgressed.

In most situations, behaviours were managed and negotiated in order to maintain a reputation as a 'good' woman and, therefore, retain status in the community that provided its members with belonging, care and protection. While there were regular transgressions from accepted behaviour, these were kept within certain boundaries. However, there were women who found it difficult to maintain this status. I met a domestic worker who worked in several different homes

in the same block of flats. She told me that a number of people thought that she sold sex because of where she worked. She was also a single mother, which may well have influenced people's assumptions. Though she lived as part of the community, she was in a difficult space of having her 'good woman' identity questioned. Women managed their behaviour and associations in order to maintain a positive identity. This process involved conforming to the power structures in place, though these were not rigid, and women found ways of challenging them. However, there were certain parameters that women in the first part of my research remained within. Although there were similarities between women who sold sex and the first group of research participants, women who sold sex operated outside these boundaries and, consequently, their experiences of communities were extremely different.

Women who Sell Sex

Communities and Identity

Like other participants, all the women I met who sold sex considered themselves to be poor and most lived in *bostis* that were similar to the one I lived in. Their homes were tin or brick dwellings, in a line of rooms, with tin roofs and shared washing and toilet facilities. Many had experienced periods of homelessness and two were homeless when I met them. This was not because they earned less money than other women; the stigma they faced meant that they were often evicted from their homes. Furthermore, many described the difficulties that they faced trying to save or keep their money secure due to their turbulent living situations. The women who sold sex and participated in my research lived in two main areas, one in the north, which was closer to the first research site, and one in the south, where I spent more time for this part of the research.

The women who sold sex in the northern part of the city tried to hide their stigmatised identities from their neighbours with varying degrees of success. Most of the participants in this area did not refer to themselves as sex workers, with the exception of a participant who had been employed by an NGO. They talked about themselves or other women who sold sex as being evicted from their homes when their identity was discovered. One participant described moving homes periodically due to the fear of her neighbours finding out that she sold sex. Another participant, Parvin, lived in the same area as her mother and close to the *mazar*, where she used to sell sex. When I met her, she was running a stall at the *mazar* selling cigarettes and

paan. She had been a peer support worker for an NGO and they helped her set up the business when the funding available for her position ran out. I visited her in her home and she said that she was able to live in her community, but no one knew that she had been a sex worker. Her mother and sister also lived close to her. The *mazar*, where women worked from, had its own community of people whom society considered outcasts; disabled people who begged for money, individuals with poor mental health, spiritual mystics, women who sold sex and pimps. Hundreds of devotees would come to the *mazar* to worship for short periods of time, but these other groups spent large parts of their lives there and some slept at the *mazar*. The *mazar* provided these stigmatised groups with means to make their living, either through receiving alms from devotees or as a platform to connect with customers. They were often provided free lunches by those running the *mazar*. Many of the individuals who spent time there formed a community which gave some sense of belonging. However, participants told me of the mistrust that they had for other women in their community. One woman told me that she did not tell others where she lived because they might reveal her identity to her neighbours.

The community of women who sold sex in the south of Dhaka referred to themselves as sex workers and their neighbours knew them by this label. Most had memories of being kicked out of their homes and being homeless but there had been significant work carried out by an NGO to allow them to live in the area without disturbance. They did not work within the area that they lived in and they paid higher rent, but they had relative security. They formed a strong sense of community among themselves and they did not form friendships with neighbours who were not sex workers. Banu, a leader in the community who was instrumental in fighting for sex workers' rights in the area, was the only research participant who was at times described as being wealthy. Her housing was a higher quality than others as she shared a bottom floor apartment in a building of flats with a couple of her friends, she had married her daughter into a middle class family, and described herself as having had wealth in the past. Even so, she never left the community of sex workers that she was part of. When I met her, she had just lost her job with an NGO and spoke of the difficulties of not having a steady income. She had to find various means of supporting herself such as cooking for a group of men and receiving money from her daughter. Both groups of women who sold sex formed their own communities, and because of their stigmatised identities, they were rejected by mainstream society.

Stigmatised Identity

Sex workers were generally referred to, and referred to themselves, as 'bad' women illustrating the extent of the stigma that they faced. They took on many of the negative views that wider society had about them (Goffman, 1963). I had a number of conversations with women who were not sex workers regarding women being sold or doing 'bad work' abroad. Participants sympathised with the women involved. They viewed men as being the ones at fault and the women involved as victims. In a conversation with one non-sex worker participant, I was told that society is too quick to call women 'bad' and people do not look at the reasons behind why women make choices to engage in bad work. Similarly, there was a TV programme on students who were manipulated into having sex with professors to pass their classes, and women expressed a disdain for the men's behaviour and were sympathetic towards the women involved. At an individual level, women had empathy for the women involved in selling sex and, though they viewed it as morally wrong, they saw much of the fault lying in men's behaviour. However, this did not translate into further actions of accepting women who sold sex as part of their community. They tried to avoid women whom they believed had questionable moral behaviour. They had to protect their place in their communities and did not want to be marred by association as previously discussed. Consequently, the women who sold sex with whom I spoke rarely witnessed the type of sympathy that was expressed to me.

The stigmatised identity of women who sold sex was a significant layer of their disempowerment. Like other participants they belonged to a low social class and were female, but they also had the added status of being viewed as immoral. The stigma they faced was stark and severe, and it is well documented in existing research on sex workers/ prostitution in Bangladesh (Alam and Faiz, 2012; CARE Bangladesh, 2004; Haque, 2011; Moral and Tahmina, 2004; Ullah, 2005). Participants spoke of being kicked out of their homes, arrested, rejected by family and beaten. A sex worker told me, 'Sex workers mix with sex workers. Good people don't mix with us' (Field notes). 'Good people' referred to accepted members of society. This was a common way of distinguishing between themselves; they were 'bad' and others were 'good'. Defining themselves as bad did not mean that they thought they were individually bad people. They often spoke of themselves in a positive light. However, they aligned themselves with a common identity of being outside the mainstream society. The following excerpt from a group

interview illustrates the societal rejection and stigma that a sex worker, Parul, and her family experienced:

People will say different things to different people. Your daughter has become bad. She roams the streets. She does this and that. She stays on the streets. She does it with ten men. That's why my parents don't speak to me and I don't acknowledge who they are. If she speaks to me again, my mother will be scolded by my father. If I speak to my mother, then my father will divorce her. Then I said to my mother, 'This isn't necessary. At this age, you're going to get divorce papers? You can get news from others. You hear whether I am well or not well from others'. My brothers drive the *Shodar Ghat* bus. When people see them on the bus they say, 'Hey, you know what your sister does?' They say she did this with this person and that with that man. Don't they feel shame? That's why they shun me. For 15 years, my guardians... not until the end did they recognise me. When disaster happens what would they do without my help? I'm there for them. This winter, in the winter before it my father got sick. For a whole cold season my father was sick. In a year, six months it's cold and six months it's hot. For the whole cold season, I went through trouble for my father. (Group interview)

The extent of the stigma faced is evident in this excerpt. Parul's family were mocked for being associated with her and, therefore, they rejected her. Her work brought public shame and separated her from the community that she had been brought up in. To a certain extent, Parul defended her family's reaction to her, understanding that they felt shamed by her. Parul chose not to talk to her mother because it would affect her relationship with Parul's father. She continued to support them, describing caring for her father when he was ill. Parul understood her family's response to her and spoke of the shame of her work, taking on the negative views associated with her stigmatised identity (Goffman, 1963). However, she also offered a positive view of herself through depicting her sympathy towards her mother's situation and her caring for her father. She described the effect society had on her relationship with her family, contrasting this with the devotion she continues to show towards them. The shame she faced, and her communal stigmatised identity are distinct from her own personal view of herself as a dutiful daughter and caring individual. She distances herself from her negative social identity by promoting her positive individual identity (Snow and Anderson, 1987).

There were other stigmatised groups that sex workers encountered and the common experience of being 'outcasts' brought them together. I first met Banu when she was involved in a play to raise awareness about sex workers' rights. It involved homosexual men and *hijiras* (members of the transgender community), as well as female sex workers. *Hijiras* were not part of the

community where Banu lived, but Banu had built up a friendship with a few of them through her activism. I described one of their interactions in my fieldnotes:

While I was there a *hijira* phoned Banu. Banu said that they had performed together, and she was asking about Banu's daughter having a child. The *hijira* said that she wanted to go to the *jamai bari* (son-in-law's home) with Banu. Banu laughed and said that would reveal her identity! She said that another *hijira* had started stalking her son-in-law on Facebook, and her daughter asked Banu to stop her, but Banu didn't know who it was. She laughed as she told the story and said that it was very embarrassing for her son-in-law. (Fieldnotes)

Banu's relationship with *hijiras* illustrates how stigmatised groups were able to form friendships. What they had in common was that they lived outside the norms of society. Banu was able to joke with this friend about not letting her visit Banu's daughter with her, because they both understood the stigma that they carried. The other story Banu told illustrates that while Banu befriended members of this other marginalised community and they shared stigmatised identities, she still had to manage these relationships. As Goffman (1963) describes, individuals often find ways of hiding their stigmatised identity in order to manage it. Being able to hide stigmatised identities enable people to avoid their negative consequences. Banu's son-in-law knew that Banu had been a sex worker but no one else in his family did. Banu hid her identity from them in order to protect her daughter from the ramifications of being associated with a sex worker and had to manage her connections with another stigmatised group in order to keep her identity hidden.

There were a number of women, like Banu, who were able to hide their stigmatised identity from their family who lived outside Dhaka city. Research conducted by Ullah (2005) on sex workers in Dhaka similarly found that urban work, such as hospitals and garments factories, enabled women to hide their identity from their families. One of Banu's close friends, Akhi, lived in a rural area with her brother. She would come into Dhaka every few weeks and sell sex for a week to make enough money to support her daughter and two grandchildren. Akhi told her family that she was working in a hospital and did shift work. Her daughter's husband had left the family and was unable to work. Akhi was supporting her grandchildren to attend school and was able to live with her family, unlike Parul, whose family's close proximity to her work prevented her from being able to hide her identity from them. The *hijira* community's visible difference made it difficult for them to hide their identity, but a number of women who sold sex, when they were at a distance from their work, were able to. Almost half of the women who sold sex that I met kept

up relationships with some members of their family and were able to hide their stigmatised identity from them. Managing their stigmatised identities involved both forming their own community because of their common identities and hiding their 'spoilt' identity from others (Goffman, 1963).

As well as hiding their identities, women described managing their stigmatised identities through adjusting their behaviour in order to make it acceptable and justifying their positions (ibid). Rekha, a sex worker in her thirties, described how she managed the violence she experienced from the police:

Everyone knows, sister, everyone. Because, I don't behave like that with anyone. Listen, if I go to the streets, whether police, from the public to the police, drivers, police, everyone loves me very much. Why? Because of my behaviour. How I am. A few policemen used to beat me a lot. They beat a lot of girls. Then I said to them, 'Brother, people come to the streets because of their stomachs, no one comes because they want to. All because of the stomach (hunger).' They now say, 'Just because of you, we no longer beat women. How could we beat them, after what you said?'. (Group Interview Transcription)

Rekha described compensating for her stigmatised identity, by behaving 'well' and by distancing herself, and others, from the responsibility of engaging in their stigmatised work. She was separating her negative group identity from her positive personal identity (Brewis and Linstead 2000). Rekha expressed pride in herself and asserted that through her actions she could have control over her situation. Her explanation takes much of the blame away from the police as perpetrators of violence and places it on the women who were victims of violence. She argues that they had the ability to avoid this violence through behaving well. In order to manage the stigma that she faced she expresses an understanding of the policemen's point of view and sympathises with them (Goffman, 1963). Emphasising her individual behaviour is more important to Rekha. She portrayed herself as the mediator who prevented other women from violence. She achieved this through displaying the 'correct behaviour' and was able to provide a legitimate explanation for other sex workers' behaviour. She separates herself from the negative stereotypes associated to her 'spoilt' identity (ibid). Rekha's recollection of her intervention and position on the streets demonstrates both how women manage their positions, and how they can maintain or create a positive self-identity, while remaining part of an extremely stigmatised group identity, which they themselves view in a negative light.

Belonging and Resistance

The Role of NGOs

NGOs provide a range of services for women who sell sex in Bangladesh, including mobilising women to fight for their rights (Haque 2011). All the women who sold sex whom I met had some involvement with NGOs, though to different degrees. Through three NGOs I met women who sold sex and two of these NGOs had to close projects during the time of my research because of funding cuts. The group of participants who lived in the south of the city and were connected to Banu called themselves sex workers. NGO involvement was a major part of their lives. An NGO project employed three of these participants to work as peer supporters and raise awareness in the areas where women who sold sex lived. However, all these women lost jobs due to the cuts in funding. Their involvement with the project gave them a sense of pride in their achievements and encouraged the ideology of sex work as legitimate work. It gave them a sense of belonging. They complained that their project had lost funds to an organisation that they claimed cheated donors. The 'us' and 'them' rhetoric in this context of competing NGOs illustrated their feeling of ownership and investment in the organisation. The following excerpt demonstrates this sentiment:

Parul: The NGO did good work. No one else did work like them. Being beaten by police and gangsters... listening to people talk. We taught them how to use condoms. Now they sell condoms. They used to be free. Now people say to me, sister, give me condoms. Where am I going to get condoms from? None... I don't have any. Now HIV is going to spread. It was low. Now girls can't get condoms. So, what was the point? Now even I work without condoms. I can't get them, what can I do? What? Now we work without condoms. So, for so long we worked hard... Now those who used to give funds, they won't work with these girls. They won't help or give opportunities to these girls. The girls aren't good. If they (donors) don't help, can they (sex workers) do anything. I have no home, I have nowhere to sleep, I can't rest, I can't wash. Who are you? Without the office, we don't have these things. Now all the girls are on the streets.

Later in the same group discussion:

Parul: In *Agargoan* (an area in Dhaka), there is a big office. There we did a play. This sister came, an important doctor came. In different areas we did it (the play), in lots of places. I liked it a lot! Joy is finished. The project is finished. It doesn't have funds anymore, I don't understand...

Banu: We didn't do anything (wrong). Other people stole, we didn't. Others just worked by the pen, but we did real work and even so, we didn't get the funds. We didn't give fake reports. We gave real reports. (Group interview transcript)

From my time spent with this group, I know that several of the statements made during this group interview were exaggerated. Condoms were still used, though not having free access may well have reduced their use. Banu took it upon herself to buy condoms in bulk and sell them at a cheap rate. I witnessed these interactions during my visits. Parul was also not homeless. When she stated that 'I have no home. I have nowhere to sleep', she was referring to other sex workers. The rates of HIV in Bangladesh are comparatively low and whether these rates will rise with the closing of projects for groups like sex workers is an interesting question, and yet to be seen. However, Parul's description of the consequences of closing this project in such extreme terms communicates just how important she perceived it to be. For her the personal consequences were high; she has lost a significant income, as well as a sense of purpose and work that she was proud of. Her work had given her a positive identity and sense belonging. The project's closure was taken to heart. Parul said that people who give funds do not want to give to these girls because they 'aren't good'. Part of her suggested explanation is a moral rejection from the 'donors' that perhaps reflects the rejection sex workers face from wider society.

The project connected these participants to people in more powerful positions than themselves such as the 'important doctor'. Banu described conferences that she had been to where she met powerful people, often international professionals, who were perceived as having a particularly high status. The NGO networks placed this group of women, who were highly stigmatised and had been in extremely powerless situations, in spaces with individuals with greater levels of power and status. It was not despite their stigmatised identity that they had access to these spaces, but because of their stigmatised identity. The NGO world that they had become part of, with its focus of HIV/AIDs, had provided these women with international links. The NGO project that Banu and Parul were involved in had a very strong sex workers' rights-based narrative that can be recognised in similar organisations and movements throughout the world. This is an example of how global organisations connect to grassroots organisations with a shared purpose and form a common identity (Kabeer, Milward, and Sudarshan 2013). Women's involvement with these networks was not only another method of accessing power, but they also provided a sense of belonging to a wider, international community.

Fighting for Rights

Part of the role of Banu and her colleagues in the NGO was to enable sex workers to live in their community without being harassed or kicked out of their homes. As I previously described and as found in other research (Haque 2011), this was a common experience of sex workers. Banu and Shaila, who lived with Banu, explained how they brought about change in their neighbourhood:

Banu: In other places people shout out, 'Oi, whore' and different things. In this area, several of us have worked for NGOs...

Parul: There are meetings...

Banu: There are meetings... sometimes twice a month. We call the landlords, we call the *huzurs* (religious leader), we call the members (of the community), we call the chairman. We bring different people and explain, 'They (sex workers) are like your sisters. And if this was your sister? If your wife was like them? If your mother was like them? What would you do? Would you throw them away? They work for their stomachs (from hunger). They have four or five children. They do this to feed them'. And our landlord is very good. He sees the sisters who do this work, he is affectionate towards their children and gives women work. Everyone says, the landlord, our landlord gave to a mosque, feeds children, he keeps three children. He donates a large amount of money. We have done a lot of work, otherwise they would bother us a lot.

Shaila: They used to disturb us a great deal. The police used to take our children. Society didn't give us any worth and treated our children badly. They would say, 'They're bad. They stay on the streets. If they stay with us, our children will be ruined.' They said a lot of things. After lots of meetings with shop keepers, members of the community, people from the area... we had lots of meetings and we explained things to them.

Banu and Shaila brought about significant transformation in the area they lived in. They created a place where sex workers could reside without being harassed. To achieve this, they had to work with the leaders in communities that had played a role in rejecting them, and they justified their work to them. The language that they used to explain their work was common. They described women as having little choice and engaging in sex work to feed their children. They called on the leaders to consider them as they would their own family. They presented themselves in a way that was acceptable and described extremes in order to mitigate negative responses, though they were never fully accepted by the wider community (Goffman, 1963). While the language used portrayed themselves and women similar to them as having limited agency, the task of contacting leaders and convincing them to treat their community differently was challenging and involved a great deal of agency and courage. Their actions are similar to

examples of women in the first group of participants who appealed to their male leaders for protection in the instances of domestic violence. Banu and Shaila utilised the skills and knowledge they had to petition to more powerful individuals to achieve their goal. This was not a small achievement. Insecurity in housing was a major concern for the vast majority of women who sold sex that I met and those who lived in this area told me how much of a positive difference being allowed to live in one place made to their lives.

The experience of Banu and Shaila reflects the process Chowdhury (2006) described of women deconstructing their negative identities during the sex workers' movement. They reconstructed a positive identity as a worker and activist. Banu, in particular, took on this identity as an activist and spokesperson for her community. She often discouraged women from describing themselves as 'bad' or 'spoilt', though other times she used the very same language herself. Azim (2000) argued that the sex workers' movement did not address debates regarding the nature of sex work and, therefore, views such as sex workers protecting other women from men's sexual desires, that are commonly held by sex workers, were not challenged. She argues the reason for not addressing the underlining debates, was that there was an immediate need that needed to be met. The sex workers' movement was a practical response to a pressing problem, women being evicted from brothels (discussed in the literature review).

Banu's explanation for women engaging in sex work is arguably similar. She called on the community to allow women to stay in the area because of their needs and justified their work because of their desperation. Parallels can be drawn with other women who looked to more powerful male leaders for protection and justice. In many ways, Banu seemed to be calling on leaders to be charitable, and then immediately went on to describe her landlord as being a sympathetic man. This language and explanation deviates from the rights-based discourse that she otherwise uses. However, it is through her skilful language and ability to stimulate compassion, that she achieved her goal. She convinced the community to allow sex workers to live in the area, which benefited many women.

Summary

Women's communities provide them with a sense of belonging and an identity. The community of the first group of participants' regulated women's behaviour and choices. Participants adhered

to many of the restrictions placed on them because their communities provided them with support and protection. A lack of power was a significant factor in the lives of all my research participants due to their social class and gender. Women identified themselves as being part of 'poor' communities and they talked about the negative effect men's higher status had on their lives. For women who sold sex, this was compounded by their stigmatised identities. These participants described how power was asserted over them, often in extreme and violent ways. Both groups of participants recognised and discussed their disadvantaged position as well as the strategies they used to manage them. They talked about the unfairness of their experiences, and they found ways of pushing boundaries and exercising change.

Women who sold sex had to form their own communities because they were excluded from wider society. These participants referred to people who did not sell sex as 'good' and called themselves as 'bad'. However, this did not necessarily mean that they had a negative view of themselves, rather that they accepted society's exclusion of them as a separate social group. The stigmatised identity of women who sold sex made it more likely for them to engage in overt acts of resistance. They had less to lose in terms of their social position than other women and more to gain because of the extreme nature of the injustice that they faced. However, although women who sold sex were more likely to resist the restrictions placed on them, they also functioned within social and cultural restraints. The forms of resistance that they engaged in involved appealing to men in higher positions using socially acceptable language and sentiments, rather than fighting against the fundamental moral beliefs of society and social structures. All women used a variety of actions and skills to maintain and improve their situations, as well as that of their communities. Within the boundaries that were placed on them, women found ways to negotiate their positions. They utilised their agency and maintained a place in their communities.

Chapter Five: Women and their Employment

Introduction

Work was a constant part of participants' lives, particularly for the women in the first stage of my field research. Between sari work, housework and other forms of employment, there was very little time in the day when they were not engaged in some type of work. Even while doing recreational activities such as watching TV, women were occupied with working on a sari or housework. Women would often do these activities together. From my observations, women who sold sex had more leisure time, playing the board game ludo or watching TV without work in their hands. Furthermore, I was told that many women who sold sex engaged in recreational drugs. Women have always worked, but employment outside the home for women is a newer phenomenon in Bangladesh and is changing the way women perceive and experience work. Although Bangladesh still has one of the lowest rates of female employment in the world (Choudhury, 2013), urbanisation and the rapid growth of the garments industry have brought millions of women into employment outside their homes. According to World Bank statistics, in Bangladesh 33 percent of women participated in the labour force in 2017, a 10 percent increase from 1990 (World Bank Group 2018b). However, when scrutinised more closely, research reveals that a much higher number of women are involved in the labour force, but this work is often informal and based within women's homes (Heintz, Kabeer, and Mahmud 2017). These more hidden forms of employment are central to women's lives and families' income.

In this chapter, I will discuss the places where work occurred and the types of work that women engage in. I will explore the choices that women made regarding their work and their experiences of work. I argue that women's engagement in different forms of employment is a response to wider societal and environmental changes which are outside women's control and which both fit within and modify patriarchal systems. While these structures are upheld, I argue that work provides women with opportunities to challenge and manage them. Women's experiences of work are often exploitative as women's lack of choices and weak positions are used for their employers' gain. Women's employment does not overturn or transform patriarchy. However, work is used by women as a tool to increase their agency and improve their positions.

These dual experiences of increased agency and exploitation were part of all forms of participants' employment, though to differing degrees.

Overview of Women's Employment

There were clear overlaps between the work that the first group of participants were involved in and that of the second group of participants, not least in the fact that they had often been involved in multiple types of work and, as table 3 shows, in many circumstances the same types of work. There were women from both groups who were working or had worked as domestic workers, in factories and in their own small businesses. There were participants from the first group who had worked abroad and participants from the second who were planning to move abroad.

Type of work women had been involved in	First group of participants	Women who sold sex	Total number of participants involved
Sold sex	0	21	21
Factory work (garments/print)	18	3	21
Sari work at home	31	0	31
Domestic work	5	9	14
Begged for money	0	6	6
Small businesses (shops/stalls)	2	2	4
Informal street based laboured	1	4	5
Teacher (NGO school)	2	0	2
Private tutor	1	0	1
NGO	0	4	4
Made clothes/ handwork at home	3	0	3
Middle person between shop and sari workers	1	0	1
Beauty parlour	1	0	1
Office cleaner	1	0	1
Office administrator	1	0	1
Sari seller	1	0	1
Clothes show room	1	0	1
Worked abroad	3	0	3
Planned to work abroad	0	3	3

Table 3: Types of work participants had participated in (in bold are the jobs that both groups participated in)

Women in Low Income Employment

Types and Places of Work

The women who participated in my research were involved in or had been engaged in sari work, garments work, domestic work, sex work, shop keeping, teaching, NGO work, tailoring, begging for money, breaking bricks, selling snacks, picking paper from the streets, office cleaning and working as a beautician. Several of the women who worked on saris from home had worked in garments factories before having children, and some had also been domestic workers. There were two participants who ran shops with their husbands and had previously worked in garments factories. A small number of participants were employed as teachers by an NGO that ran schools in their area. One of the defining ways in which women discussed their work was where it occurred, whether it took place within their communities or was *bahire kaj*, which literally means 'outside work'. The space in which work occurred was significant because 'outside work' for women challenged the systems of *purdah* that are ingrained in much of Bangladeshi culture (Choudhury 2013). In the urban situation acceptable spaces for women to occupy were extended to women's immediate geographic communities which included men who were not relatives. There were connotations associated with women leaving these communities without a clear reason.

Inside Work

All participants took the primary responsibility for the housework in their homes. This involved cooking, washing dishes, looking after children and washing clothes. Women spoke of the differences between housework in the urban and rural settings. Some women felt that having their own fruits and vegetables improved their quality of life, which was more common in the rural setting. However, others said that life was more difficult in the village because a greater amount of physical labour was required. There were several women who imitated rural farming activities by keeping ducks, chickens, pigeons and goats and who grew edible plants around their homes. Image 5 illustrates



Image 5: Squash grown on home

some of these activities, showing squash being grown on the outside wall of a home and a chicken wandering around the area. Most women expected their daughters to help them with housework and rarely involved their sons in these tasks. These activities were gender specific. However, there were exceptions and women praised men who helped them with housework. I witnessed this on a couple of occasions. Trying to juggle housework, childcare and other forms of employment was one of participants' primary complaints and concerns. It was rare for a woman not to earn an income. During my research, I only met one woman who exclusively did housework.

The vast majority of women, and many girls, were engaged in a particular form of sari work common to the area. It involved gluing shiny beads onto saris. Shops gave saris, glue, and shiny beads to the main contact in the community who distributed the supplies to other women and kept a record of their wages. It was a form of work that had been practiced in the community for approximately two years. The distributor of the supplies paid a fixed rate for each piece of work completed, based on the intricacy of the work. These were expensive saris, and women often commented on how much rich women would spend to buy them. Participants worked on the saris in their homes. Images 6 and 7 are pictures of my neighbours doing this form of sari work. For an average sari, they were paid 500 taka (£5.21).



Image 6: Girl working on a sari



Image 7: Work on a sari

The amount of time taken to complete a sari varied greatly, depending on how much time they devoted to it and their ability. Women, who did not have other jobs and spent a significant part of their day working on it, completed a sari in four to seven days. Those who did not have a husband contributing a substantial amount of money to their household costs had other forms of employment. Women did not live exclusively on their earnings from sari work. It was often

undertaken around other activities; girls would do it when they came home from school and women when they had finished their other work. This form of employment is similar to work described by Mies (1982) regarding her research in India on women's work. Mies argued that these forms of informal home-based labour were extensions of their roles as housewives. The employers were able to pay minimum amounts and provided no benefits, and women were unlikely to unionise due to the informal nature of the work.

Another form of work from home that was less common was tailoring and sewing clothes. Fewer women engaged in this work because there was less demand and it required technical training and a relatively expensive sewing machine. One of my participants was a tailor and had received her training from an NGO. Some of the more educated women tutored children from their homes. This was a flexible way of earning money and was in constant demand because of the education system. It is widely accepted in Bangladesh that students can only pass exams if they are privately tutored. All of these forms of informal work fit around women's primary responsibilities, which were housework and childcare. While being insecure and poorly paid, they allowed women to have flexibility and control over their working day.



Figure 8: Neighbourhood shop

There were two women in the area who ran small shops with their husbands at the back of their homes. I was told that this was a distinction between the urban and rural situation for women. In rural Bangladesh, it was rare for women to run shops because it is seen as too public a role for women. However, the shops were located in the community in which my participants lived meaning it was considered a type of inside work. Image 8 is a picture that shows a small shop that sold snacks, hot tea and essentials. These shops were social areas where people would gather to drink tea and chat as well as buy household essentials such as eggs or biscuits. Similar *cha dokans* (tea shops) exist throughout Bangladesh,

but their clientele are predominately men. In these urban communities, women also sat on these wooden benches and socialised, usually when another woman was running the shop. Similar to the shops, but less permanent, were snack stalls set up by women in the community. One of the shop keepers started her business by selling snacks to children coming out of school and they developed her business into a shop. *Pitha* stalls are a seasonal business because *pithas* are snacks that are sold in the winter. From November to February, the stalls popped up all over the neighbourhood and were mostly run by women. Women's roles in running shops and snack stalls were an example of changes that took place for women in this particular urban setting. However, there were restrictions that were maintained. Women took on a more visible form of employment, but this did not extend to leaving the boundaries of their communities.

Outside Work

Domestic work takes place outside women's homes and communities but inside someone else's private space, making it an unusual mix of both public and private work (Sen and Sengupta 2016). A few participants cleaned the homes of middle-class families. They often worked in several homes for a set amount of time. For example, one woman worked in four households for two hours in each household, earning the highest amount that I came across for a domestic worker, 8000tk (£84.10) per month. I was told that the average amount for a woman working from eight to three was 2000tk (£21) to 2500tk (£26.28) per month. I met a woman who worked in two houses receiving a total of 1700tk (£17.87). Some participants had worked as live-in domestic workers as children. Child domestic workers generally received food and board rather than a salary.

Work in garments factories was the second most common form of employment, after sari work. It was garments work that brought women out of their communities and into *chakri*, the word used for formal work. Among the women I came across, the lowest base salary was 3500tk (£36.78) and highest 7000tk (£73.57) per month, though women often earned more with overtime pay. The garment factories that women worked for varied hugely from massive ten storey buildings to tiny one small room operations. The smallest factory that I came across was in the middle of the neighbourhood of my research and only had twelve employees. All the women I spoke to walked to work and did not have a long commute. Many came home for lunch. I visited two factories; one was at the edge of the neighbourhood and the other was about ten

minutes' walk away. The first had eighty-three employees and made children's shirts and jeans that were exported to Dubai. The factory was a large, light single room with lines of sewing machines. The majority of the employees were female and were generally young. The few male employees worked at the side of the room cutting cloth, and the manager who showed me around was a man. The second factory that I visited printed designs on t-shirts. It was approximately twice the size of the first factory and consisted of a large dark room with no windows. In the middle of the large room were long tables that the employees stood at to work. Most of the workers were female but there were less distinctive gender roles than in the first factory.

There were schools run by an NGO situated in the heart of the community. The teachers of these schools were women from the area who were in higher education, either for their Bachelor's or Master's degrees. They were from families with low incomes and their parents were rarely highly educated, so they had done exceptionally well educationally. Their work as teachers was not well paid (less than garments) and was part-time. However, teaching gave them a higher status than other forms of work, it involved less hours, and teachers expressed a greater enjoyment of their work and fulfilment in the role. The job was viewed as a stepping stone to other forms of better paid employment. The majority of the teachers wore *burqas* which may well have reflected middle class aspirations as well as attempts to protect modesty. *Burqas* were not the norm, though not unusual, for women in the community. For that reason, the fact that most teachers wore them was significant.

Employment Abroad

Many participants and other families in the neighbourhood had links to relatives who lived abroad. The largest number was in Middle East, though some had family in America and Switzerland. Everyone I met who had worked overseas had a 'middleman' who organised their travel and work abroad. *Bidesh* (abroad) was seen as a place of opportunities. Fewer women went than men although it was less expensive for women to go. Considering that working outside a woman's community was pushing social boundaries, the fact that a number of women went to another country to work was very significant. People were fearful of women working abroad because of the reported risks. There were suspicions of the negative moral effects on women and concerns regarding their distance from family. Even so, women would often talk

about moving overseas as a dream or way out of their financial difficulties. The reasons women gave for not going were that they would miss their children, many had heard negative stories from women who had returned so deemed it too risky, and their families would not allow them to. The experiences of participants I met who had worked abroad were varied though more negative experiences were reported than positive.

A participant, Dilruba's ma, who was a shop keeper when I met her had lived in Bahrain for several years when her children were young. From her work abroad, she brought back enough money to buy a home and shop. She was the only participant who owned property. She described how before going overseas she struggled to support her young family through garments work. She decided to go work abroad so that she could earn more money and was able to leave her children in the care of her mother. She had little formal education and was determined for her daughters to go to school. She described meeting women from different countries in the factory where she worked. After working there for a few years, she was able to return to Bangladesh and invest the money in her shop and home. All her children either were in secondary school or had completed secondary school. One of her daughters was at university. While women going abroad to work was viewed with suspicion, Dilruba's ma was one of most respected women in the community. She used her work abroad to improve her family's financial and social status. Hers was one of the success stories

There were other women who did not have such positive experiences. Saad's ma lived in the lane across from me. When I first moved into the area, I was told that she lived abroad, and her young children were being looked after by her next-door neighbour whom I often visited. In the excerpt below, I described when I first met her:

We went to the house next door to Uday's home. Lots of people were stood around the door watching this woman (Saad's ma). Saad and his sister were sat on the floor and their father was at the *chula* (stove) cooking. They didn't have a bed. There was an old, torn up *kantha* (handmade blanket) on the floor that they were sitting on. The woman was moving around the room, sorting out clothes. She largely ignored the crowd though every now and then she would ask someone to come in or say hello. At first, I thought that maybe she had had a mental health breakdown because the back of her *kamese* (tunic) was tucked into her *shalwa* (the trouser part of women's clothing) and she wasn't wearing an *orna* (scarf). However, as the time went on she put on an *orna*, pulled down her *kamese* and became more responsive to people. She had obviously just washed, her hair was

tied up in a *gamcha* (thin towel), and she said that she had just arrived from the airport, so she must have been tired. I sat in their home when they asked me to. No one else did except Udoy's baba (a neighbour) who was sat in the house. They got us tea and biscuits, and some man outside the door who was asking about me bought me 7Up. Udoy's baba told me that his wife was in the village for two days. He also said that Saad's baba was a good cook. I asked Saad's ma where she had been and for how long. She said that she was in Lebanon for ten months and that she returned because she was sick. There was a small bag in the corner and it looked like it was the only thing she had brought back with her. (Fieldnotes)

It was unusual enough for a woman to go abroad that the return of Saad's ma was met with great interest from the neighbourhood. In contrast to Dilruba's ma, Saad's ma returned with the same number of items that she had left with. She gained nothing financially from her ten months of work. There were many rumours about the time Saad's ma spent in Lebanon and the reasons that she returned early. People said that she was tortured and beaten by her employers, and that she was sent back because she was mentally ill. Saad's ma told me that she had been beaten and badly treated. Her parents died when she was a child and she was the second wife of her husband who provided a small amount of financial support to her and her two children. She had worked in garments factories before going abroad but wanted to earn more money. She said that a married couple in the neighbourhood organised her travel and work for a fee, but her experience was completely different from her expectations. Her brothers had ended communication with her because of her decision to work abroad. For several months after returning, Saad's ma seemed disorientated and depressed. She could not afford to buy a bed and, when her daughter became ill, she struggled to pay for medicines. She slowly recovered and found employment at a garments factory. As time passed, she became more positive about her experience abroad. She described the food that she ate and the languages people spoke. She told me that one of her wishes had come true: she got to sit on a plane and see another country.

Choices Regarding Employment

There were numerous intertwined factors shaping the forms of work that were available to women and various reasons for their entrance into urban employment. At a global level, climate change caused rural homesteads to be destroyed by rivers eroding large areas of land (Penning-Rowsell, Sultana, and Thompson 2012). Bangladesh is known for being vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters and climate change. It is situated in a lowland delta, sandwiched between the Himalayas with glaciers melting at an increasing rate in the north and rising sea

levels of the Bay of Bengal in the south. When livelihoods are lost, often as a last resort, people migrate to urban areas in search of work (ibid). Women's journeys to urban employment often began with this migration. Many participants identified the loss of their rural homes as the reason for their migration to Dhaka. About half the neighbourhood came from the same ancestral village home where river erosion had destroyed their homes and livelihoods.

Furthermore, an ever-growing population has fuelled mass urban migration and there is a lack of sufficient employment in rural areas. Global multinational companies in search of cheap labour have contracts and have built up relationships with factories in Bangladesh (Banerjee Saxena 2014). The jobs available at these factories have attracted people from villages to move to Dhaka. Positions in garments factories were generally the best paying jobs for low-skilled workers, which has affected other forms of work. Several participants felt that garments factories had raised salaries in other sectors. For example, women said that employers had to pay them more for domestic services because women had the choice of working in garments factories. However, domestic work was still generally chosen when there were relationships already formed with a wealthier family and garments work was unattainable or too demanding. In places where there was a high number of garments factories, rent greatly increased. High living costs in Dhaka made it difficult for families to survive on a single salary which increased the demand for female employment opportunities. As well as their gender, education levels affected the types of jobs that women were able to pursue. Participants often blamed the lack of opportunities for better jobs on their poor levels of education. A number of garments factories had a minimum literacy level requirement.

At a personal level, the running of the household and the needs of the family were the most common reasons given for the choices women made regarding their work. Several participants chose to stop working outside the home to care for their children. Uday's ma expressed the sentiment of many women that I talked to: 'Sitting at home working you can run your household and look after your children. This gives a bit of peace' (Interview transcript). Uday's ma had two children. Her husband rode a rickshaw and was the main provider of income to the household. Uday's ma and her husband were proud that they kept traditional gender roles. Maintaining these gender roles was key to how many women made their decisions regarding work. Women

saw parenting as primarily their responsibility. Uday's ma explained how important she believed it was for women to fulfil their duties as mothers:

Participant: For women, the best work is sari work, *Punjabi* (male tunic) work, work with your hands... all this. With all this work, you can do your household work and you can sit at home making some money and income. Saris, three pieces, all this work is convenient for girls. All this work women can do at their convenience. Other work cannot be done at convenience.

Interviewer: And the most difficult work?

Participant: The most difficult work is garments work. You lose all your time for household work and looking after your children. And if you work from home, you can look after your children and work. And at garments you work all day from seven in the morning and return at eight at night. So, can children be looked after? Isn't that difficult? So, it's good for women to work at home. (Interview transcript)

For participants like Uday's ma, children and household work were clear reasons given for choosing to work from home. Others, whose husbands contributed less to the family expenses, chose to work outside the home for a higher income. When asked how women made decisions about what types of work to be involved in, a participant of a group interview explained:

It depends on people's needs. For example, to run my household I need ten thousand taka (£103.73) monthly but my husband earns five thousand taka (£51.87) so then certainly I need to do work myself. I have children, need food, to pay the rent, need clothes so if I go to garments then my family can manage. Education... children need to eat, they can't go without food, clothes... certainly someone needs to (work). (Interview transcript)

Several women said that they would like to find employment outside the home, but their husbands would not allow them to. Many participants were proud that their husbands were 'providers' and that they did not have to work outside their home. Woman's role and identity as a mother shaped their choices about the types of work and employment that they engaged in, both leading them to employment outside the home and refraining from it depending on their family circumstances.

Families and individuals varied on their views of women in employment outside the home. The majority of families were happy for female members to work outside the home, but this was not true of all families. There were also women who went against the wishes of their family or husband, choosing to find outside employment despite objections. In an interview, a participant described how she chose to work despite her husband telling her not to:

One day my mother-in-law gave me *shak* (spinach) to cut and I was cutting it slowly. She said, 'You cut so slowly! When are we going to eat?' She said, '*Kanki magi* (insult)'. She said to my mother, 'You gave birth to this *kanki magi*. Didn't you teach her how to work? I'll pull out her hair and teach her.' I said, 'Say what you want to me but don't treat my mum like this.' I said this. After I said it, she slapped me. She said, 'You bother me so much for your mother. Can't you learn how to work properly?' I said, 'I am doing work but if you talk to me like this I am going to tell my husband that we should live separately.' Then I told my husband, 'Your mother does these things, come on let's go live separately' (from his parents). He said, 'No, we're not living separately. The way things are, is the way things will stay.' My brother-in-law was very good. He would say to me, '*Bhabi* (sister-in-law) my mother isn't good, and my brother isn't good, you should leave and return to your parents.' I said, 'No, if I go to my parents, people will say bad things about me. I live in the *bosti*, they will say, 'How long was she married? Now she's back!' This and that.' So I said, 'What I'll do is get work.' They wouldn't let me work. But then I started anyway. I would come home at 5pm. The place where I worked before I was married, that's where I started working again. We both started (working), my husband and me. After joining, I worked a long time. (Interview transcript)

This excerpt reveals the differences in attitude towards work, both housework and employment outside the home. It is interesting that the expectations of housework of Juma and her family were different from that of her mother-in-law. The mother-in-law's insult was that she did not learn how to do domestic work properly and this reflected badly on her family. Juma's first response was to try and live separately from her in-laws. When her husband did not agree, she chose to obtain employment outside the home to get out of her difficult domestic situation. She saw this as a better alternative than returning to her parents with a tarnished reputation. Employment outside the home was often viewed as a safety net that allowed women to make choices that were more morally desirable than the alternatives or from being destitute. Juma's older sister, Nazrin, who was also in a difficult marriage with a husband who gave her little financial support and was often violent, spoke of how she viewed garments factories to have benefited women's lives. I described her descriptions of the garments industry in my fieldnotes:

Nazrin talked a lot about enjoying work, how the factory had good conditions and how the garments industry helps women. She said that many of her female colleagues had husbands who had left them or were not working and single women who supported their family. (Fieldnotes)

Receiving a regular income allowed women who were not supported financially by their husbands to run their home independently. In Bangladesh, unmarried, widowed and divorced women are more likely to participate in the labour market than married women (Bridges, Lawson, and Begum 2011). For many women this was their only way of supporting themselves

and the level of choice involved was severely limited. However, young women like Juma and Nazrin had worked in garments factories before they were married and viewed returning to this work when they had difficulties as a way of managing their challenging marriage situations. Their decision was not purely based on financial need.

Experiences and Perceptions of Employment

Necessary Hardship

'All work is *koshto*' (hardship/ difficulty) is how women commonly described their work. It was a necessary hardship. It was a normal part of everyday life for everyone, but women's need to juggle domestic work and employment was recognised as a particular struggle. A young mother, Parul, who was a sari worker, said:

Women are struggling a lot. Those women who work a lot have a lot of money, but they are suffering as well. I only know this; that those who have a lot of money suffer and those who don't have money they also suffer. As women, we go through a lot of hardship. Working in garment is hard work. After coming back from work you need to cook and give food to your husband, finish your housework and then finish working for your children. That's why women go through a lot of hardship. What I think, I don't have any hardship, but this daughter, when she grows up, we need to give her a good education. So, I don't have hardship but also I do. I work, make saris. Doing sari work is hard work. Any work is hard. But if I do this from my heart? Then no work will feel like hard work. (Interview transcript)

Parul expresses her views on how different women struggle but also on how this commonality unites the female experience. She suggests that, whatever work women engage in, suffering is involved. At the end of the paragraph, she seems to contradict herself, saying that she both did and did not have hardship. She articulates how as a woman work, and therefore suffering, is inevitably part of her life. However, her last two sentences suggest that there is some conciliation gained from this work if it is carried out 'from the heart'. There is an emotional fulfilment that can be retrieved from the hardship of work.

It was generally agreed that work in garments factories was the most physically difficult, with the longest working hours, but the factories varied greatly. A neighbour who lived across from me, Moni's ma, and with whom I had regular contact, rarely returned home from work before 10pm and had very few days off during the year of my field research. When a big order came in, she worked through the night. She was physically exhausted and often said that her body could no longer take the pressure of the work. She worked for a small print company that was

contracted to print designs on t-shirts for larger companies. These factories are often hidden and therefore avoid regulations that improve working conditions (Hira 2017). I described a conversation that I had with Moni's ma in my fieldnotes:

I saw Moni's ma working on a sari with Moni. She said that she had returned from work at 10pm the day before. She said that before that she has been working until 1am every night. She would get in at 1am and then be cooking and doing house work until 2.30am. She still needed to wake up at 5 am in the morning. I asked if she was going to work today and she said that she had taken the day off because she was exhausted. (Fieldnotes)

On the other hand, another neighbour, Nazrin, usually returned home by 6pm though sometimes later. She received a day off each week and had annual leave. She worked for a larger company, which generally had better workers' conditions than the smaller factories. Nazrin described the factories where she worked:

Our garments environment is very nice. And if you're a bit sick you get time off. It's a very good environment, a very nice, clean environment. There's not much scolding. In normal factories, they scold you... there are lots of problems. So, the one where I am is pretty good. But other factories don't give you permanent employment. And factories that are good finish at 7pm. These ones you don't have too much working time, the good ones. And every year you get holidays, and every week you get a day off, salaries are given on time, bonuses are given, the money is good. (Interview transcript)

Of my research participants, Moni's ma and Nazrin experienced the extreme ends of garment workers' working conditions. The factories that other participants worked in represented a whole range in between. The majority of participants who worked in garments factories returned home between 7pm and 9pm and received a day off most weeks, though not all.

Instability

The insecure state of low-income employment in Dhaka was felt by the vast majority of people I met, both men and women. However, their position in society and their more limited job opportunities compounded the problem for women. Sari work depended on shops and middle people and the current fashions. Women had no protection against being unfairly treated. I was told that piece rates for saris had decreased by a hundred taka in the two years that the women in the area had been doing the work. Similarly, there was no regulation of domestic work and it offered little security. The garments industry was distinctive with regards to the fact that they have trade unions. However, none of my research participants mentioned these unions. The effect of unions and raised awareness regarding the conditions of garment factories was noted

by a few women. Parvin's ma had started working in the garments industry in 1997. She described changes that took place since then:

Every day I didn't get off work until twelve. I'd go at eight, then come for lunch from one to two, and then have another hour's break at six and then finish at twelve. Then, we'd need to cook, wash, and do *namaj* (prayers) and then have to wake at dawn to cook and wash and do *namaj*. It was like this for a few years. After a few years, there were cases against the garments. People can't work until twelve. Then slowly we started working until ten, then eight and then seven. (Interview transcript)

Similar changes have taken place in many factories over the years such as salaries being paid on time and work conditions seeing improvement. Even so, there was still a large number of factories where these problems continued to exist. During a group interview, women spoke of their concerns regarding the instability of garments work:

And if I can't go one day, they take off payment for three days of hard work. And if I'm meant to get my wage on the 10th, often they don't give it until the 20th or 25th. If I have to give my rent on the 10th, then I'll get scolded. If I can't pay my rent on time, the landlord will scold me. These are the difficulties. (Interview transcript)

Although salaries had increased, the cost of living had also significantly risen. For all women in urban employment, the rising cost of living in the city caused concern regarding their security. Furthermore, there were few legal protections of which women were aware, making work precarious.

Violence and Abuse Experienced through Work

Most participants who worked outside their homes and communities reported experiences of violence or mistreatment in their place of work to some degree. A group of women described their experiences during a group interview:

Interviewer: Okay and what's the most difficult type of work? What's the hardest?

Participant 1: Domestic work

Participant 2: Domestic work

Participant 3: Think about it, you have to work in four or five houses. Domestic work is very difficult. And the money is low.

Participant 1: The work is a lot and money low. You can work from eight in the morning until 3pm and only get 2000 to 2500tk per month. It's a lot of hard work.

Participant 2: You have to clean and look after children.

Participant 1: And the way people treat you...

Participant 3: And how you're treated...

Participant 2: If you're not feeling well and don't go, you're sworn at.

Participant 3: Dirty language...

Interviewer: Have you done domestic work?

Participant 2: Yes, I used to do it.

Participant 3: Lots of people do.

Participant 1: I worked in someone's home for two or three months. If I didn't go one day, the things they would say! *Baba!* (Interview transcript)

This type of verbal abuse was described in garments factories as well as in domestic work. There were also reports of more severe violence, both in garments factories and in domestic work. A young girl who I met said that she left the garments industry because of sexual abuse that she witnessed and feared that the same would happen to her.

Empowerment through Employment

As common as experiences of abuse and exploitation were in work, pride in work was also expressed for all forms of work. Sari workers described how fast they could work and how they had improved their skills. A garments worker said that her work gave her a sense of pride, and it took away her worries and difficulties. She talked about how she could progress and develop in the garments setting. Other women expressed similar sentiments regarding garments work. Two participants who were domestic workers described how well they were able to work and that their employers were able to trust them.

There was pride expressed in earning an independent salary and not having to depend on money from their husband. A group of women were teasing a teacher whose husband worked in the Middle East about her husband returning and buying her gold jewellery. The teacher proudly replied that she earned her own money and was able to buy her own gold jewellery. Gold jewellery was used as financial security for women, so the statement had particular significance. Furthermore, mothers were concerned that their daughters would be able to gain skills for future employment. The majority of the girls with whom I spoke had aspirations of becoming professional women. When I asked a young girl (around six years old) in a class why she wanted an education, she replied, 'to stand on my own two feet.' Work was viewed as a source of empowerment, providing independence and an avenue of growth.

Women who Sell Sex

Places of Work

The space in which work occurred was important to women. In chapter four, I described a group interview in which participants told me that though there was nothing intrinsically wrong with women working on the streets, the associations with 'the streets' prevented them from doing so. They explained that being on the streets could automatically affect a woman's moral status. A participant succinctly expressed, 'One woman might be coming and going for bad work and another for work, but people will think that she is becoming bad' (Interview transcript). As well as the social associated link, there was a real relationship between women who sold sex and those who had been involved in begging for money on the streets and informal street-based labour such as breaking bricks and collecting paper. The only participants who had begged for money sold sex when I met them, and all but one of the participants who had been involved in informal street-based labour sold sex.

I found no women who identified themselves as sex workers in the first research site, but there were rumours that a teenage girl in the area was selling sex because of the amount of time that she was spending outside the house and people sighting her on the streets. There was also a family of women who were described as doing 'bad things with men'. The second group of participants had all either sold sex or were selling sex when I met them. They worked at either a religious site or the main train station. Shah Ali Mazar, image 9, is the grave site of a saint, one of a number who is credited with bringing Islam to the region. At dusk women sold tea from flasks on the side of the street, outside the mazar walls, where they made contact with customers who they had sex with in parks, alleyways or hotels. The women who sold sex at Kamalapur Railway Station, Dhaka's main train station (image 10), stood outside the station, where they made contact with customers with whom they had sex in similar places to the above.



Image 9: Shah Ali Mazar



Image 10: Kamalapur Railway Station⁶

A participant who sold sex at the *mazar* told me that she earned 200tk to 300tk (£2.08 to £3.12) per night and worked five nights a week. A group of self-identified sex workers said that they bargained with customers who usually paid 100tk (£1.04) for sex, which took place in alleyways. They said that on an average night they would have five customers, and sometimes as many as eight. However, they complained that there were now young girls, in some cases children, selling sex from the train station. They said that this was taking their work and some nights they could find no customers. A woman who sold sex at Kamalapur train station told me that she met customers at the station and then went to hotels to have sex with them. They would pay her 500tk per (£5.24) night. If she went to their home, they would pay her 1000tk (£5.48). This is the highest amount that was reported to me during the time of my research. It is interesting that this woman could earn the same amount in one night as women in other employment earned in one or two weeks. However, she was homeless, sleeping either at the station or an NGO drop in centre. The stigma she faced made it difficult for her to find housing and she said that her insecure living situation resulted in her having large amounts of money regularly stolen from her.

All the women who sold sex that I met had some connection to an NGO, whether it was through the sex workers' network, drop in centres or accessing health services. A sex workers' NGO employed three participants when I met them. Due to a loss in funding, they all lost their jobs during the time of my field research. Two returned to sex work. Banu, my main contact, found other forms of income such as cooking for a group of men and her adult daughter also sent her

⁶ Ahmed (2009) Available from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kamalapur_Railway_Station.jpg

money. Their employment by the NGO had given them social status and they described finding fulfilment in helping other women. Many women who sold sex had worked as domestic workers and a few as garment factory workers before they became sex workers. One participant sold vegetables at the market as well as selling sex. She was trying to leave the sex trade but said that she did not earn enough from her market work to allow her to do so.

Many women who sold sex were in a different form of work before they started selling sex. One participant, a young woman whom I met at the *mazar*, had worked as a domestic and garments worker. She described her experiences in both places of work:

Farhana told us that when she was young, a woman said that she would get her a job in the city. She was happy when she heard this and thought that it would make her life easier. She went to the city and worked in a home. She found out that another girl who worked there had been raped and killed so she ran away. She said that she then worked in a garments factory where a supervisor led her into a room promising her sweets and raped her. She then started selling sex and living at the *mazar*. (Field notes)

In most forms of work in which these participants had been involved they reported experiencing abuse or violence. It was often when working as domestic workers that women or girls experienced the sexual abuse that they said led to their joining the sex industry. The excerpt above clearly illustrates this transition and reflects the findings of previous research that found sex workers had often worked in garments or domestic work, and a significant number had been sexually abused before entering the sex industry (Alam and Faiz, 2012).

Work Abroad

Three participants were making arrangements to go to the Middle East when I met them, and others had friends or relatives living there. There were connotations associated with women going abroad that concerned these participants but due to their already stigmatised status, they were less of a barrier. However, a participant described how her family's concerns prevented her from moving abroad:

I wanted to go... my brothers... I tried to get a passport to go but my brothers discouraged me. I mean, they said different things like in that country fathers (laughs) fathers do it, sons do it, uncles do it. And they say it's very difficult. Don't brothers and sisters hear this from people? That's why my brothers said 'no'. Even so, by myself, I got everything ready to go to Saudi but then my brothers said 'no', you don't need to go. They hid my passport so that I couldn't go. (Group Interview transcript)

This participant was able to hide her identity as a woman who sold sex from her family in Bangladesh. Their view of the situation for women in the country that she was planning to move to was negative and they went to extreme lengths to prevent her from going. Ironically, while this participant was prevented from going abroad because of fears for her safety, not leaving meant that she continued to sell sex. The reason that sex workers gave for wanting to work abroad was as a method of escaping the sex industry.

The following excerpt from my fieldnotes describes a conversation between a group of sex workers:

Shaila came in and we talked about her going to Saudi. She said that it only cost 20,000tk (this is the cheapest I've heard). She said that the money was for her travel documents and her employer would pay for the plane ticket. She will work as a domestic worker. Halima, Shaila, and Banu said that they know lots of women who have worked abroad, and many have a difficult time, but Banu said that it is not the same for everyone. Lots of people are treated badly and others are treated well. People have different experiences. I said that I heard that Lebanon was a particularly difficult place for women to work. Everyone said that actually Saudi was the worst place for women. Halima said that she still wanted to go work abroad. Banu said that her daughter won't let her work abroad. (Fieldnotes)

The group recognised the risks of going abroad to work but were willing to take them. Though Saudi Arabia was seen as the worst place for women to go, Shaila still wanted to work there. There was a sense of fatalism, that she could have a good or bad experience, but this was completely out of her control. However, Shaila felt that her situation in Bangladesh was difficult enough to take the risk of being mistreated abroad. As a sex worker, she faced violence and saw work abroad as a way of escaping her difficult life and earning greater amounts of money. When participants discussed their plans to migrate for work, they all recognised that there was possible danger with going but wanted to use it as an escape from their life. While this may seem to be a conflicting view, it made sense in the context of women's experiences. Experiences of abuse were a normal part of their existence.

Choices Regarding Work

Compared to the first group of participants, there was notably less sense of agency described by women regarding entering the sex industry. They described being raped or sold into the industry as 'being made bad'. When I met the women who sold sex involved in my research, they all worked independently and, therefore, were not being forced to sell sex. Most called

themselves sex workers and were clear that they believed that they engaged in legitimate work that benefited society. However, they rarely made a distinction between their childhood rape and abuse and their later work selling sex. They felt that their being 'spoilt' or 'made bad' forced them into selling sex and, therefore, it was not their choice. The following quote is from a group interview with Banu who had been a sex worker for many years. She was a middle-aged woman who had been working for an NGO for several years when I met her:

Banu: Sister, me... during my childhood it was difficult and needy. My father didn't work. We two sisters started to beg (for money). My big sister and me. One day when we got home, my sister was beaten. So, my sister took me, and we got on a launch (river boat). We got on the launch and arrived at *Shordur Ghat* (main river port in Dhaka). We stayed there. Staying there one day... I mean, we got to know the people there. One shop keeper gave my sister something... he gave my sister 500tk and told her to buy cigarettes. My sister went to get cigarettes and ran away. Then he found me and told me to give him 500tk. Then he took me and with five others and raped me. At that time, I was small, seven or eight. They did this to me. And then that place was torn. They were big men. From there I was in the hospital for three months. Then the hospital... I was admitted into the government hospital, Mirpur hospital. Around there were foreigners and I used to ask them for money. While I was begging, the *fokir kana* (vagrants home) took me. They took me to another place. I stayed there for a while and then went to work in someone's home. There they would do this to me. One day the father would and the next day the son would...

Halima: ...for that reason, this work...

Banu: ...for that reason, this work... one day the father did it and one day the son did it. So sick, sister. Then they all went to the village leaving me behind. The mother and father went but the son and son-in-law stayed. What did they do? This act and I had fever and was sick. I said 'no' but they didn't listen. Being beaten, I came to the streets. If people asked, they said that I stole and that's why they beat me. They saw me steal, that's why they beat me. That's how I ended up on the streets. You go to one place and they do this to you and you go to another place and they do the same. That's why I ended up on the streets. (Interview transcript)

Banu began with the description of how she was raped as a child when she explained how she became a sex worker, even though she did not start selling sex until much later. It was at the point of having what was considered an illegitimate moral relationship, whether that was forced or consensual, that changed or 'spoilt' the moral identities and was perceived as leading women to sell sex. Rekha, a sex worker, described how her experience of sex led her to engage in selling sex:

After a while a boy moved next door and fell in love with me. He loved me, and I loved him. He took me and then what happened? He made me have sex. He said

that he was going to marry me. We had sex. He didn't want to marry me? That is when I got into sex work. Then he didn't want to marry me, ja! You had sex with me, marry me... When he didn't want to marry me, that's when I entered this path. That person whom I loved, who would take me down a good road, doesn't want to marry me. When he didn't want to marry me, I didn't say anything. I stayed with him a long time, doing sex work, he'd take my money and beat me and do this and that. (Interview transcript)

Being made 'bad' or becoming 'spoilt' was their reason given for doing 'bad work'. These were terms commonly used when women described beginning to sell sex. Key to their descriptions of selling sex not being their choice was avoiding taking on blame for their work. This demonstrates how ingrained the belief systems are regarding women's moral status. Nonetheless, there were exceptions. During a group interview Limu, a sex worker in her twenties, described how she became involved in sex work:

This is me, I don't have a mother... I don't have a mother... I never saw my mum in my childhood. So, my dad got married again and my stepmother was not nice to me. After that I stayed here and there, stayed home... I'm young, right? I go here and there, do naughty things, do some hard work, struggle for food, as I was doing this I fell into the hands of a man in the village. So that man said if you go to Dhaka, he has people there who can give me work. He has a girl. If I go to her I can work and live. He said that. After the conversation, I came with him. I didn't say this to anyone and left. I didn't have my mum so there was no one to take care of me. I was sad in my heart and came like that. After coming that lady gave me a place that was fine, she kept me with her daughter. After staying I saw her go here and there. Men come, and I see them do stuff. This was a bad situation. But I left home and came a long way, so I don't have any other place to go to. And if I go, I will not have a place and an address. Here I have a place. They know me, so I stayed and became bad. Became bad... I left the environment and became bad, but after that I saw them become more distant. People go here and there, no one gives to me ... Right? So, I must find my own way. (Interview transcript)

Limu has a common story in many ways. She was promised a job and found herself in a situation where she sold sex. However, her language differs from many other participants as she described how she decided to stay and sell sex. Although Limu said that she made this choice and gave considered reasons for it, her agency was extremely thin. She was young and vulnerable with few options. She described having no one and if she had left the situation, she would have been homeless. She later explained that she did not understand the consequences of her decision at the time of making it:

I didn't have anyone at that time. I lived by my own will. How ever I wanted to live, I lived. At that time, I didn't realise the shame of losing my virginity, and that once I lost it I would never get it back. The future would be bad for me. This is no life. I

need to improve my life. At that time, I didn't realise this. Now I understand.
(Interview transcript)

Once women had their stigmatised identity of being 'bad', there were many decisions made regarding remaining in the sex industry and the ways that they worked. Limu met and married a man to enable her to leave sex work. She described herself as beautiful and used this to convince the man to marry her. However, her husband started acting as her pimp. She described taking back control of her situation:

Then one day I started screaming and shouting in front of neighbours. I said I will no longer do this. I will not live with you. I trade myself to earn for you. Why should I earn money for you? If I have to do this, then I can do this for myself. So, it is better for me to earn alone. To feed you if I have to sell my body then why am I with you? Then I left him. That's the time I realised, that this work of sin I am doing and also feeding him with my earnings, why should I do this? No! This will not happen. A husband is a husband. If he is my husband, then he will not trade me to earn his living. And if he wants me to earn then he will tell me to do good work. Huh! 'We are husband and wife, both of us will work together. Both will work and live in Dhaka city. Both will do honest earning.' That should be what he says, but he leaves me on streets to work. If I go out at night, then police will stop me. Then general people are bad too. So many things! Will I bear all this torture to feed him? That's why I left. This is not possible for me. I will not do this any longer. I will sleep with ten people and I will commit this sin and you will not share the burden of my sin?! I said this to him and left. I left. He tried to keep me. But I didn't pay any attention to him. I will no longer stay with you no matter what you do. Then he threatened me. He wanted to destroy my face. Still I didn't go to him. Then I hid. I lived in another place for a long time. After leaving, slowly things got better so I moved back here again. (Interview transcript)

While women were often in extremely exploitative situations, there were many examples of how they made decisions to take control of situations. In the quote above, Limu described realising that she did not have to work for someone else and she risked her own safety to achieve her independence. She held on to understandings of her work being morally wrong and what a good husband should be like. She used these beliefs to justify her decision to work for herself.

Violence and Abuse

Abuse and violence were common reasons given for women entering the sex industry. Violence continued to be a central part of the experience of their work. It was an expected part of the industry and is a well-documented part of the experience of sex workers in Bangladesh (Alam

and Faiz 2012; Haque 2011; Ullah 2005). During a group interview, a sex worker described the violence that she and other women who sold sex experienced:

How much difficulty, how many beatings we go through. If a person says that they're going home, that's good. On the streets, the situation is not good. In *Motijheel*, in *Gulistan*, they (sex workers) are lined up like dogs and beaten. Is your own life more important, or money more important? If you want to save yourself, you can't earn money. (Interview transcript)

Without exception, all the participants of my research who sold sex described violence as a part of their work. The main perpetrators of the violence were clients and the police. Being arrested and put in jail or the vagrants' homes, which were described as being like prisons, were common experiences.

Advocacy, Purpose, and Opportunities

I first met my primary contact, Banu, at a drama practice. She and another participant were involved in a play to raise awareness about sex work. Banu and, to a lesser extent some of the other participants, were involved in fighting for sex workers' rights. They distributed condoms to women who sold sex and encouraged them to go for regular medical check-ups. The participants involved in advocacy work passionately defended sex work as a form of legitimate work. During a group interview Banu explained:

I think I'm a doctor. I am giving these people a service. Those people who come to me are patients. They are a patient. I am a doctor. I use my whole body and they give me money. (Interview transcript)

Banu clearly stated that there is a purpose to their work. She viewed sex work as a service similar to one that a professional like a doctor provides. She was owed money for the service that was supplied. Interestingly the language used and description of providing a service is almost identical to the words used by participants of research carried out by Haque (2011) with street-based sex workers, which suggests that a common narrative is used within this community.

The word *kaj*, which usually means work, can be more generally be used as to do an action. Sometimes when women described being raped, they would say 'he did *kaj* sex' to me. The translation of work is therefore not straightforward. However, women made statements about selling sex, such as describing it as a service or comparing it to other work, that did demonstrate that they defined the act of selling sex as work. Sex work is translated as *jouno kormi*. Many

women who sold sex used this term to refer to themselves as well as calling their work 'bad'. *Jouno* can be directly translated as sex. *Kormi*, the word used for worker, is generally used for a professional or office worker. For no other form of work did my participants refer to themselves as a *kormi*. NGOs and activist groups used this label. While identifying themselves as doing 'bad work' suggests that women accepted a stigmatised identity put on them by wider society, identifying themselves as *jouno kormi* illustrates that they took on the NGO's identity as an activist and professional. Both of these identities were accepted by many women who sold sex illustrating the complexities of their experiences.

NGOs employed four participants as peer support workers. Their work with these NGOs involved going to meetings with people in higher social positions than they would normally come into contact with. Banu described doing a presentation at a conference:

She told me about how she was called to the Sheraton Hotel for a conference and she talked about sex workers. She said, 'Society makes us bad and it is your brothers, uncles and fathers who come to us. We do not seek them out; they seek us out. We're like doctors who give a service. No one chooses this path on their own. Society makes us who we are'. She said because of her talk she was chosen to go to Thailand, but she was too scared to get on a plane, so she hid for two weeks. (Fieldnotes)

Because of her stigmatised identity Banu went abroad (though she avoided the trip to Thailand she did take a train to a conference in India), mixed with international people and was given an NGO job. She had a low level of education but was asked to speak at large, international conferences. Her identity as a sex worker resulted in her being part of work that she would not otherwise have had access to.

Summary

In order to meet living costs, all participants had to earn an income. Where this income was earned was significant because some forms of work brought women out of their communities and this position held social significance. While this challenged some patriarchal norms, it existed within a complex set of rules that governed women's movements. Earning an income gave women independence and personal satisfaction. Having opportunities to work outside the home allowed them an option for further independence and increased mobility. However, it frequently resulted in experiences of additional hardship and was, therefore, often not desirable. Work both challenged and maintained patriarchal structures. Whatever type of work women

were involved in, their work did not offer stability. They could swiftly lose their jobs and had few labour protections. Furthermore, external forces could rapidly change their situation. Employment was just one tool that was used by women to manage their precarious lives.

The debate regarding exploitation versus women's agency has played a significant role in discussions and debates regarding the garments industry and the selling of sex. However, it plays out in all forms of work. All participants were part of macro social structures that took advantage of their weak positions. At the same time, structures were being bent and slowly changed by new opportunities for women and their increased agency. Women's involvement in the sex industry was described with notably less agency than other forms of work. However, women did take ownership of deciding to continue to sell sex and of controlling their income. Once in the sex industry, women's experiences of work were characterised by violence, abuse and stigma. Because of their low status, women who sold sex caught the attention of international organisations and were employed by NGOs to fight for their rights. Women who sold sex faced the extremes of other forms of work, both in the lowliness of their stigmatised status and the access they had to powerful actors.

Chapter Six: Women and their Families

Introduction

Family relationships were central to all participants' lives. Interactions with husbands, children, parents, and siblings shaped women's identities, sense of purpose and well-being. Their core beliefs and morals were intrinsically linked to their views of how families should be formed and operate. However, the realities of family life varied and were shaped by shifting circumstances and situations. The increase in women's work and social changes brought about by urban life have resulted in significant changes to family structures (Jesmin and Salway 2000). While these changes have challenged some aspects of gender norms, core beliefs and ideals regarding family relationships have seen less change. As in other areas of their lives, women used the resources available to them to manage their situations and families were one of the most significant resources that they drew from. They determined many of women's decisions and had the greatest influence on women's wellbeing.

I begin the chapter by discussing the fundamental role of marriage in women's lives. While women held the ideal of a husband as monogamous provider, absent husbands and polygamy were common. Work opportunities and urbanisation increased women's ability to be independent and created spaces for them to push boundaries. Children were a significant source of hope and aspirations for women. Mothers desired for their female children to be successful in their education and employment as well as their future marriages. Furthermore, there were changes to the traditional family practice of women living in the homes of their in-laws. There were a number of ways that women who sold sex were similar to other women in regards to their family. Marriage was important for women who sold sex though they did not depend on their husbands for financial support and their husbands were often financially dependent on them. Like other women, aspirations for children were extremely important. Arguably the greatest difference between the two groups was that women who sold sex had much more strained relationships, or often no relationship, with their wider families. For both groups, many 'traditional' notions of what a marriage and family should look like were held on to, but the realities of family life were lived out very differently. This meant that women's support systems were weakened, but this also gave them increased levels of autonomy.

Women in Low Income Employment

Marriage

In Bangladesh marriage is near universal and there are few options for women other than to marry (Jesmin and Salway 2000; Munro, Patterson, and McIntyre 2015). Marriage is expected to be arranged by the parents or family 'elders' (Jesmin and Salway 2000). Bangladeshi law provides similar rights in marriage to men and women, though the legal age for marriage is 21 years for men and 18 years for women (K. Hossain 2003). Islamic law has distinctive differences between the sexes with regards to marriage. For example, it is easier for a man to divorce than a woman and men are permitted to marry up to four times. Bangladeshi law permits polygamy with the wife's permission. The practice of dowry, which involves money or gifts being given to the bridegroom and his family to secure a marriage, is a common custom in Bangladesh. However, giving a dowry is not supported in Islamic law and is a criminal offence in Bangladeshi law (ibid). The guardianship of women, defined as the responsibility for their financial maintenance and their protection, traditionally passes from women's fathers to their husbands at the time of marriage (Munro, Patterson, and McIntyre 2015).

My research participants held on to the ideal role of the husband, often expressing that they would like for their husbands to support them. In reality, many men did not provide this support for their wives, either physically or financially. Nevertheless, the status of marriage for adult women was held up as essential. Even when they were separated from their husbands, being officially married provided women with social status. There were some women, particularly those who did informal sari work at home, whose husbands were the main family providers. However, this was not the case for a large number of women. There has been a rise in rates of divorce, separation and women-led households in urban, low income communities in Dhaka (Jesmin and Salway 2000). Reasons include greater employment options for women allowing them to be independent of husbands, weakened social structures and the more transient nature of these communities. In village homes, families lived in the same area for generations and individuals were deeply embedded in their wider families and communities. *Bosti* communities were made up of individuals who migrated and were less connected to these wider groups.

Table 4 outlines the marriage status of the participants who provided this information. It demonstrates that women experienced marriage in different ways. Several women were separated from their husbands or were only visited by their husband who lived with another wife. A couple of women admitted that they had been married more than once. This could have been true of other participants, but it was a sensitive piece of information to disclose and I did not ask participants directly.

Marital status	Number of participants (42)
Never been married	10
Married/ had been married	32
Lived with husband	19
Lived separate from husband, but husband visited	7
Separated from husband	4
Husband had more than one wife	9
Participant had been married more than once	2
Widowed	2

Table 4: Marriage status of participants

While all the women I met planned to marry, a number delayed their marriages to work and earn money to support their families. The age of women's marriages are reported in surveys as being remarkably young, an average of 16.8 years old, considering the advances in girls' education and increased work opportunities (Streatfield et al. 2015). However, research that investigated the mis-reporting of ages by women found that 56% of women underreported their ages, and the actual average age of women's first marriages was 18.6 years old. The research suggested that various societal changes increased the age of marriage but that normative rules encouraged girls to report younger ages to make them more desirable for marriage (ibid). Marriage has been changed by wider societal changes, while many core beliefs remained the same. Views on what constitutes a good husband further demonstrate conflicting views on marriage.

The Good Husband

There were several women who praised their husbands and talked about being happily married. Udoy's ma, a middle-aged mother of two, described her husband as a 'good husband' who would not let her work outside the home. A major factor in the description of a 'good husband' was the ability to provide for their family. The notion of a husband telling their wife not to work was, therefore, often viewed as a positive trait. Udoy's ma described getting a job as a domestic worker when she was angry with her husband as a way of defying him. She did not stay in the job for long and often told me proudly that her husband would not let her work outside the home. However, I overheard a conversation between Udoy's ma and another neighbour, in which she described trying to get work in a garments factory. She was turned away because she was unable to read and write. I asked her about this and she confirmed that she wanted to work in a factory but was unable to because of her lack of education. She had told me that her husband would not allow her to work outside the home to illustrate that her husband was good and willing to be the main provider.

Tamina's ma was a woman in her early 20s who suffered from poor physical health. She described her spouse as a 'good husband' saying that he paid for her medical treatment, took on a long commute and chose to live far away from his family to allow her to live close to her family. While her husband being a 'provider' was central to her praise of him, the fact that he made a significant sacrifice for her wellbeing was also highlighted as important. Views on marriage were not static but were underlined with traditional views. As already stated, Udoy's ma worked outside her home when she got the opportunity but was still proud that her husband told her not to. In contrast, Tamina's ma saw her husband as good both because he took on the role of provider and because he took the unconventional decision to live near her family rather than with his.

One of my next-door neighbours, Moni's ma, whose husband worked at a local garments factory, compared her husband to men who do not support their wives. Like Udoy's ma, she said that her husband did not want her to work for an income:

There are many (women) suffering. I mean, after coming to their husband's house, their husband doesn't feed them, doesn't provide clothes for them. They say, 'You work, I will not work and will live from your income. I won't bring home an income.' But my husband never said these things to me. This sari work that I do? He scolds

me saying, 'I won't allow you to do this work'. See, I don't do work sometimes. And sometimes he says, 'You cook all day, take care of our daughter, then look after the house and after that you do sari work. I don't like this'. (Interview transcript)

Like Uday's ma, Moni's ma saw her husband not wanting her to enter employment as a positive character trait. It demonstrated his concern for her wellbeing and willingness to support her. Recent research carried out in a Dhaka *bosti* found that men held on to patriarchal views of the importance of being the main earner (Banks 2013). Households where men earned higher amounts were significantly less likely to have female family members earning an income. Men described female work as necessary, not desirable. One male research participant said, 'For poverty, our habits are going bad' (Banks, 2013: 99).

Significantly, in the case of Moni's ma, her husband recognised the value of her housework and childcare. He viewed her sari work as an additional burden. However, it did not actually stop her from working for an income. Most days, I saw her working on saris and her husband regularly assisted her with this work when he came home from his job at a factory. Her husband's recognition of all the work that she did and his actions of helping her with her work indicated a real concern and understanding of her workload. The language used of forbidding his wife to do a task illustrated Moni's ma's depiction of her husband being a 'good husband' who fulfilled his duty as a provider, rather than a controlling one. Furthermore, in a seemingly contradictory statement, Moni's ma said that her husband did what she told him to do. The following excerpt is from the same interview as the one previously quoted:

I have a husband who is after my own heart. He does whatever I say. I tell everyone, 'Pray to Allah'. I hope that everyone's husband is good, so that they have peace at home. (Interview transcript)

Being respected, listened to and helped in practical ways were all appreciated by women and they referred to these traits as good qualities of a husband. Women described husbands forbidding them to work in a positive light, to demonstrate that they took responsibility for supporting their family unlike other men who they saw as 'bad husbands'.

The Bad Husband

As important as having a 'good husband' was identified as being, many women expressed dissatisfaction with their marriages. There were several women in the community who had been abandoned by their husbands and, therefore, were the only earners in their family unit. There

were a number of men who had more than one wife and were unable to support their multiple family units sufficiently. Furthermore, there were men who were only married to one woman but did not contribute enough money to support their wife and children. In these situations, marriage was described as a considerable cause of hardship. Research by Banks (2013) on urban female employment in Bangladesh, similarly found that a number of men became financially dependent on their wives when their wives began to earn an income. This was resented by women and identified as a 'bad' trait of men by the male research participants.

Due to husbands' absence despite being married, many women functioned as single parents. Kabeer (2000) discusses the 'social contract' of the patriarchal system in Bangladesh. She argues that through economic necessity, it can be negotiated. This was apparent in the lives of participants in my research. There was an increase in the mobility and decision-making power of women whose husbands did not conform to the 'social contract' of providing for their family. However, this was still not accepted as a good state of affairs. Furthermore, housework continued to be mainly done by women. I only witnessed men doing housework a couple of times. Women had the double burden of doing all the housework and earning an income outside the homes.

Nazrin was a young woman who had one child and paid for all the household costs. She described her marriage:

In many ways, God has kept me well. But from my husband, I have lots of hardships. Even now he is not good. His nature is very bad. He has relationships with girls. He's different. What I want is not in his mind. What I want is for him to be good, whether he feeds me or not. At *poila boishak* [Bengali New Year celebrated on the 14th April] he was with a girl, before the operation (referring to an operation that her husband had). What I want to see is him to be better and work. Even so, what else can I do? Life is hard. This, I work and eat, life is hard. My one hardship is that I married and now I'm in hardship. (Interview transcript)

Nazrin enjoyed working and was financially better off than many of her neighbours. She had married against her parents' wishes when she was a young teenager. Her greatest sadness was not that she had to support her family but that her husband's moral behaviour was not what she believed that it should be. The ideal of a 'good husband' was not just a practical one, of having someone to provide financially. Women expressed a wish to have a morally good husband. Nazrin said that she wants him to be 'good', whether or not he provides for her. She

said that she wanted him to want the same things as her. In the previous quote, Moni's ma said, 'I have a husband who is after my own heart,' and that a 'good husband' brought peace. Both Nazrin and Moni's ma expressed a desire for an emotional understanding with their husbands, and this went beyond simply wanting a provider.

Nazrin chose to remain with her husband despite her parents encouraging her to leave him. She explained her decision to stay with him:

When I was newly married I had a lot of affection for him, and he would leave me. After two or one month, he would return. Again, he'd return and stay for two to one month. This was difficult for me. My father would say, 'He is bad, you should leave him. Still nothing has happened with him. We will look well and find you a husband'. Then I thought no! In life, you marry once. You will get rid of him?! With things going like this, many days passed. In this way he would come again and leave again. A habit had formed in his mind to leave like this. He leaves and then returns. My life was very difficult. I thought that people only have one marriage. If I marry again and the second husband is bad, then what would I do? Will I keep on marrying like this? This way does nothing happen to a girl? A bad reputation happens. (Recorded interview)

It was widely agreed in the community that Nazrin had a 'bad' husband. Several women in the neighbourhood commented on this, generally expressing sympathy for her, and her family were constantly complaining about him. However, Nazrin gave two reasons for her staying with him. The first was the view that a woman should marry once and the second that a subsequent marriage may not be any better. Her concern for her reputation and the need to be in a marriage illustrates how Nazrin conformed to the norms of marriage. However, it would have been acceptable, even preferable, in the minds of her family and a number of neighbours with whom I spoke for her to divorce. Her family told me that Nazrin loved her husband, and this was why she did not leave him. I observed both conflict and affection in their relationship. Nazrin financially supported her husband and chose to stay in a marriage with him despite clearly stating that she did not believe that he lived up to the expected role of a husband. She was able to articulate her reasoning, weigh up the consequences of her options and make her own decision about what action to take. Her decision was based on a mixture of her view of marriage, her moral identity and her affection for her husband.

The vast majority of women described an ideal marriage and family as one in which both they and their husbands would work and provide for their children. This was notably different from

the majority of male participants of Banks' (2013) research, who viewed female work as a necessary evil and to be avoided if possible. What is evident is that, although women had clear ideas of what a husband should and should not do, most were able to use their resources such as work and family support so that they did not have to depend on their husbands. In this way, they were able to manage without their husbands' support. In cases like Nasrin, roles were reversed as far as the wife financially supported her husband. However, marriage gave women a moral status and it was therefore desirable to have a husband, even if he was 'bad' one.

Marriage was delayed for women who had families who supported their daughter's education. For others, it meant negotiating ways to further their careers despite their marriage. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes describes the experience of the participant Shapla in ensuring that she received an education against her family's wishes:

A teacher from a neighbouring *bosti* came to learn English from me. We sat in my room and she practiced speaking and writing. She had studied up to Master's level and her English was very poor considering. We mostly spoke in Bangla though I translated what she said into English since she was meant to be having an English class. She told me that she came from a very poor family. She has six siblings and they all grew up on only her father's salary. She grew up in and still lives in the neighbouring slum. Her brothers and sisters all got a good education despite their poverty. She has worked as a school assistant since she was in class 9 (later became a teacher). She used to work from 9 am to 5 pm for a thousand taka. Through her earnings, she has paid for her education and bought land. She is about to complete her Master's but is poor at English so finds it hard to get a good job. Her desire is to find a good job. She said because she had to work throughout her studies, she often couldn't go to classes. She would just take the exams so there are gaps in her education. She said that she was sad about her marriage. Her parents made her marry an uneducated man. He was unemployed for a while but now has a job. She dodged my questions about what he does. She has two children. (Fieldnotes)

This teacher worked in an NGO school part-time and did shift work in an office. Neither job paid well. Shapla sometimes said that she told her husband that she was going to work when she was really coming to visit me because her husband would think that she was wasting her time with further learning. There were several barriers to her achieving her goal of getting a good job; the low quality of her education, her marriage, her poverty and her lack of connections. Despite the various challenges that she faced, she asserted her agency through working to pay for her continued education. She conformed to her parents' decision for her to marry, while refusing to abandon her education. She was embarrassed by her husband's low social status and she was

trying to increase her own standing. She disapproved of her own husband for reasons most other women did not identify. She had to conform to a form of marriage that she did not approve of while continuing to try and fulfil her own ambitions.

Like other participants, marriage was essential for Shapla. Ideals of husbands being the primary earner and of supporting their wives financially and emotionally were held on to by many women. However, when this did not happen they were able to work to support themselves and their children. The changing social structures of the urban city and the availability of work made the prevalence of women being the main earner more common place.

Managing Polygamy

Although Islam allows polygamy for men, it is generally frowned upon in Bangladeshi culture and is not widely practised (Rozario 1992; S. C. White 2017, 1992). However, a larger percentage of my participants were in polygamous marriages than in most of the country. Although almost a third of married participants' husbands had more than one wife, this was viewed as an embarrassment and cause for discontent in families. The wives would live separately, in different neighbourhoods. Often one of the wives lived in the husband's rural home. Parvin's ma, a mother of two in her mid-thirties, described her father marrying a second wife and the affect this had had on her family:

My father married again. He had our mother, he had us, but even so he married. Since then there was no peace. Is there any peace when two wives live together? No, there isn't. After that our mother took us and we spent a lot of time at our maternal grandfather's home. We spent most of our time there. (Individual recorded interview)

This lack of peace, caused by polygamy, was a common perception. The husband of Parvin's ma also had two wives. She described her husband's second wife physically attacking him when she found out that he was already married to Parvin's ma. He was badly injured, and Parvin's ma nursed him back to health and paid large amounts on hospital bills. Apart from the conflict brought in some cases of polygamy, there was also the practical consideration that most men could not afford to support two families. When Parvin's ma described her marriage, she gave monetary and practical support as the two main reasons why her husband's dual marriage caused her hardship. She said:

At that time, he was riding a rickshaw. It's difficult riding a rickshaw. You can't support two families with the money you get from a rickshaw. With one person working, isn't it hard to run two families? (Individual recorded interview)

And later in the same interview:

Today I treated him badly. I swore at him a lot. Yesterday her (referring to her daughter) chest was hurting. I called him. He didn't come. He didn't even answer the phone. That woman (referring to her husband's second wife) answered the phone. I was irritated and last night I couldn't sleep. I was looking at the clock until 5 am. At 5 am I sent him news and shouted at him and treated him badly. It wasn't right to treat him badly but when you're impatient you don't remember this, do you? Your mind doesn't stay right. What will I do? What won't I do? I think if her father (her husband) stayed in the house, then I wouldn't have to stand this alone. I could share it. Going to the doctors, I have to go alone. If someone is with you, isn't it better? (Individual recorded interview)

Parvin's ma had worked in a garments factory and her mother provided childcare for her daughter. This meant that she did not have to rely on her husband's support. With access to work and family support Parvin's ma, like many other women, was able to live independently from her husband. Her second child was born severely disabled and her mother died a week after he was born. She was left with little available support and had to leave her job to care for her children full-time. She then had to rely on the little money she could make from working on saris at home and the support her husband gave her. Work thus allowed her to have a certain level of independence, but this was precarious as the types of work she engaged in did not provide stability and there were few safety nets. Therefore, as she explains in the quote above, the absence of her husband was particularly difficult for her to manage.

Apart from the practical objections women had to polygamy, there was also moral disapproval. Women usually avoided talking about their husbands' other marriages, unless they were telling me their life stories or discussing their hardships. Women were often embarrassed to admit that their husband was married to another woman and I only found out after I had known them for several months. Men who chose to marry multiple times were viewed by women as irresponsible and their families not living up to the ideal of a family. A young girl, Mohima, told me that another family was 'bad' because the father had two wives. The same girl a couple of months later told me that her father had two wives and asked me not to tell anyone else because she was ashamed. The family that Mohima told me was 'bad' interestingly was one of the few examples of polygamy that seemed to be approved of and accepted by both wives. Laily's ma and her

family lived in the last room of my lane. She told me during a recorded interview that her husband had an older wife and grown up children who lived in another city. The following notes describe when I met her husband's first wife:

I later went into Laily's room and sat on the bed to watch TV. Laily's baba and baby brother were sleeping but Laily's ma told me to come in anyway. Laily's ma was working on a sari in front of the TV and Laily was cooking on the floor. Parul and Mohima's ma (neighbours) came in and out of the room at different times standing and watching TV. Mohima and an older woman were also sitting on the bed. The older woman asked me different questions. Where do I live? Where am I from? I asked if she lived in the area. She had food in her mouth but even so, it took a while for her to respond. She then pointed to Laily's baba and said that he is her husband. Parul then said that the woman is Laily's *boro ma* (big/older mother) and Laily's ma's sister (this is a polite way to refer to someone and does not imply that they are biological sisters). She seemed to be trying to explain to me in an indirect way that this woman was Laily's baba's other wife. The woman said that she is married to Laily's baba, but she had an accident so couldn't work and gave Laily's baba in marriage to Laily's ma. She has four sons and one daughter, and her sister (Laily's ma) has two children. She lives with her family in Chittagong but sometimes comes to visit. Laily's ma had told me about her husband's first marriage during our interview. Laily looked embarrassed when the situation was being explained to me. (Fieldnotes)

From the description of this meeting, it is apparent that the introduction was not entirely comfortable. Parul, the neighbour, tried to explain the relationship to me indirectly and Laily was uncomfortable with the whole situation. The first wife of Laily's baba was the most direct in her explanation, but even she felt the need to justify the relationship. She did so by explaining that she could no longer fulfil her duties as a wife and that she gave Laily's ma to her husband, possibly taking away the blame from him and asserting her agency in the situation. Both wives in this marriage seemed accepting of the arrangement. The first wife was disabled and, therefore, unable to fulfil her perceived responsibilities as a wife but continued her relationship with her husband and his second family. Laily's ma had explained the relationship and reasons for the marriage when she had told me her life story before this meeting. She occasionally expressed that she could find the first wife an annoyance, but otherwise seemed to like her and did not resent her presence.

Another factor in this family make-up was that Laily's ma had also previously been married and had a son from her first marriage. Unlike for men it was completely unacceptable for women to practice polygamy, but some women had married more than once. While it was not a subject

that was openly discussed, Laily's ma told me about her first marriage when I interviewed her. It was widely known that her son from her first marriage lived in the neighbourhood with his wife. Despite Laily ma's less socially accepted family make-up and marriage history, it is important to note that she was one of the most widely liked and respected women in the neighbourhood. She was looked up to by the younger women and was someone whom women, including myself, would go to for advice. What this illustrates is that, while there may be idealised forms of marriage and families, it was common for these not to be met and this was an accepted reality by the community. Social norms were not rigid or absolute.

Domestic Violence

Many participants discussed domestic violence when identifying a 'bad' husband. Research indicates that domestic violence against women is widespread in Bangladesh (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2006; Murshid and Zippay 2017; Rahman, Hoque, and Makinoda 2011; Sambisa et al. 2011; Sayem, Begum, and Moneesha 2012). For example, a study of several countries conducted by WHO found that in Bangladesh 61% of women in urban and 53% in rural areas had experienced violence from their spouse (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2006). Analysis of the 2007 Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey found that 25% of women had experienced domestic violence in the previous year (Murshid and Zippay 2017). Similarly, an urban health survey found that 35% of women living in slums had experienced domestic violence in the past year compared to 20% who did not live in slums (Sambisa et al. 2011). A study of 331 disadvantaged women in Dhaka explored how women justified domestic violence (Sayem, Begum, and Moneesha 2012). 84% named one or more scenarios in which violence was justified, with the majority including disobeying or not listening to your husband (Sayem, Begum, and Moneesha 2012).

These earlier studies mirror the experiences and views of women in the area where I lived. Early on in my time there, I was speaking to a group of women about my research. I said that I came to learn about women in Bangladesh. They asked, jokingly, whether I had come to learn about how to be beaten. A man popped his head around the door and said that a man should beat his wife every week to keep her in order. Everyone laughed. Domestic violence was viewed as a normal occurrence. However, I witnessed or heard of domestic violence happening only a handful of times during my research, and it was usually disapproved of. When women discussed domestic violence, they were usually sympathetic to woman involved but also referred to the

woman's behaviour to judge whether she deserved punishment. Excessive violence was stopped by family and community members and was clearly stated as a behaviour of a 'bad husband'. I described a domestic violence situation and how neighbours and family intervened:

Nazrin went into Laily's ma's room. Her husband followed her and tried to hit her. Laily's ma and other neighbours pushed him out of the room and Laily's ma started shouting at him. Nazrin's baba came shouting at Nazrin's husband and was acting like he was going to hit him but was held back by the neighbours. (Fieldnotes)

A participant told me about years of physical abuse that she had endured from her husband. She said, 'Marriage for women is rotten. If she beat him the way he beat her, she would get in trouble, but nothing happened to him. But he would know how it feels' (Fieldnotes). Her sentiment illustrates how many women felt about the domestic violence that they experienced. While they did not have a general moral objection to domestic violence, they felt that the violence that they experienced was unjustified and excessive. Furthermore, they saw the need to protect other women who experienced violence from their husbands. In my fieldnotes I described how a participant tried to help her sister leave a violent relationship:

Parvin's ma told me that her sister had a crazy husband who beat her very badly. She ran away with her two children to her father's home. Parvin's ma said that her father can't afford for the children to attend school. She wants to return to Dhaka and work but somewhere her husband won't be able to find her or know where she is. She told me that she was telling me in private because if others heard they might tell the husband, who is extremely violent. She was trying to find work for her, somewhere that her husband wouldn't be able to find her. (Fieldnotes)

I did not have participants tell me that it was always wrong for a husband to be violent towards their wife and sometimes comments were made about when women deserved to be disciplined by their husbands. Nevertheless, women were actively involved in protecting their family and neighbours from domestic violence. Like the participant who said that she wished that she could beat her husband to show him how it felt, they often discussed the injustice of having to experience violence that men did not.

Relationships Outside Marriage

In the urban situation where my research was conducted, women and men who were not related lived in close proximity, going against traditional practices of *purdah*. However, general rules of *purdah* were still observed. Unrelated men and women had limited contact and were generally not allowed to be alone together. If women deviated from the accepted moral behaviour, there

was a risk of this negatively affecting their reputation and being excluded from their community. Even so, some women were willing to take these risks. The use of mobile phones and the internet created opportunities for people to initiate forbidden relationships. My neighbour complained that her husband 'liked' a picture of an attractive woman on Facebook and this caused conflict in their relationship. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes is another an example of how women connected to men through mobile phones:

While we were waiting to go out, Nazma's immediately older sister Juma came and sat in my room. She was talking on the phone to a man whom she obviously did not know. She asked him where he lived and whether he was married, and then whether he had a girlfriend. In reply to a comment he made about this, she said, 'I'm just asking, people often have someone'. She asked his age and he told her that he was between 60 and 65 years old. She acted surprised and at first thought that he was joking. He seemed to insist that he was that age. Nazma came into the room and asked her who she was talking to. Juma hung up and said that it was someone that she didn't know. I asked how he got her number and she said that she's using her friend's sim card, so he was someone wanting to get in touch with her friend. (Fieldnotes)

From this story it is clear that mobile technology was a new tool that allowed women to interact with men in ways that they would otherwise be unable to do. Juma was able to be flirtatious with less risk than if it had been a face-to-face meeting. These instances may be seen as expressions of women resisting certain restraints that they have in their lives. Research conducted by both Lynch (2007) and Hewamanne (2016) explores the ways in which garments workers in Sri Lanka would push moral boundaries while maintaining family links despite the patriarchal systems in place to control them. Their research participants were mostly unmarried and living in temporary situations (Hewamanne 2016; Lynch 2007). This is a significant difference between the participants in my research.

Even so, the dual experiences of the internalisation of moral norms and challenging them was reflected in some of my research participants. Furthermore, there were a number of unmarried teenagers whom I either knew or heard about who had relationships with boys or men. Some teenage girls ran off to get married against their parents' wishes during the time of my research and several research participants had done so when they were teenagers. Women often had discussions and arguments about how much freedom their daughters should have. They questioned with whom girls were talking on the phone. A teenage girl told me, very disapprovingly, that several of her friends had a party involving alcohol which was a particular

taboo. Girls in the community were therefore pushing moral boundaries in much the same way as Hewamanne (2016) and Lynch (2007) describe.

Over the time of my field research, there were a few rumours of women having affairs or relationships outside their marriage. The closest and most dramatic one involved Juma from the excerpt above. She had a relationship with a single man living in the same row of rooms as her parents. The following incident happened when her husband became aware of it:

Suddenly, two men came running through the hallway and went into the men's room. There were lots of shouting and people following them. The children came back and said that a man grabbed one of the men by the neck and was trying to strangle him. I was told that the two men fighting were Juma's husband and a single man who drove a CNG (auto-taxi run on compressed natural gas) and lived in the men's room. Juma's husband had found the man phoning Juma. Juma's family seemed very involved in the fight. Some men came, and they were checking numbers. Juma's older sister was shouting about Juma being a *karap mohila* (bad woman) and *buski* (whore). She said people became like that because they hung out with women like that. Juma's father said that he would have disciplined her. Laily's ma agreed saying that Juma's husband made too big a scene and should have discreetly told Juma's parents. When Juma's father wasn't looking, she pointed to Juma's family and said, 'They're not very good'. The drama continued for quite a while. Then a second crowd gathered outside Uday's line of houses, where Juma had lived at one point. (Fieldnotes)

From this excerpt, it is evident just how public these private affairs were. In many ways, the whole community took part in regulating and assessing Juma's behaviour. Her family were both involved in judging her, with her sister shouting insults at her, and responsible for her behaviour. Her father said that if he had been told earlier, he would have dealt with the situation. Furthermore, they participated in the shame or stigma that Juma faced. The neighbour labelled them all as 'not very good'. Juma's individual actions affected her family's standing in the community as well as her own.

It was evident that Juma suffered public humiliation and rejection from her family during this time. She attempted to commit suicide by hanging herself soon after. The next day I talked to Juma's younger sister Nazma about what had happened:

Nazma said that her sister Juma had become *karap* (bad). She had started a relationship with this guy when she lived in the room where her family are living. She said the man is also *karap* (bad). He knew that she was married and talks on the phone to lots of women, but her sister doesn't understand. They had put a

tawis (charm) on the husband so that he wouldn't know, and he still doesn't understand properly. Nazma feels sorry for him, but he is young, and Juma chose to marry him herself. Juma was found today trying to hang herself. Her husband broke down the door and stopped her. I asked what will happen now. She said that her sister and husband will get a divorce. Either her family or Juma will move away, because her father doesn't want them to have a relationship with her anymore. Juma's husband will take their child. I asked if the other man would marry Juma and she said no. He has lots of women and is not interested in getting married. Juma has already packed her bags and is leaving tomorrow. I asked if it is not risky for a woman to move away by herself. Nazma said that she will live in a mess with her friends. She has done this before. She had a relationship with another man over the phone. Nazma said that she wishes that they could move far away but they can't because they are poor. Everyone will know, and it is an embarrassment for the family. When there are fights at school people will bring it up. The relationship between Juma and this man had been going on for a long time. They tried to convince them both that it was bad, but they didn't listen. (Fieldnotes)

Because Juma's decisions affected her family, there was initially a rift between her and them. However, Juma did not go to live with friends as her sister told me she would, and within a week she was regularly spending time with her family again.

I interviewed Juma shortly after these events. She never directly discussed her 'affair' but did talk extensively about her marriage. She had run away from home to marry her husband when she was a young teenager. She often referred to this action as a reason for her personally being to blame for the hardships in her marriage. She had lived with her in-laws in a rural village and described them as being abusive. To manage the situation, she first got a job and then left, moving back to her parents' home. When she returned to Dhaka, she again got work to support herself and her son. These different actions were ways of her managing difficult situations as well as resisting the systems that she was expected to live in. She used work, her mobility, her family support and a relationship with another man to defy her husband and his family.

Juma's husband followed her back to Dhaka. She described her husband as not providing enough for them, as lacking understanding and as being violent. In the interview, she made it clear that she did not plan to stay with him:

My hope is that I won't stay with him. One thing, if there is no love in a home, then it is impossible to stay. He does not treat me well. We have been married for four years and up to now, he still hasn't given me any clothes. He won't buy me soap, he won't give me oil, he won't give me toothpaste. He won't give me anything! When I have to run the household by myself, is there any use for him? Before I

went to my father, this time I'll go far away, I'll go very far... *Chittagong* (the second largest city in Bangladesh)... that type of place, I'll go and then I'll phone my mum and say, 'keep my son,' and every month I'll send money. It's not possible for me to stay with him. If I stay with him, I'll hang myself. I have tried to hang myself twice. We fought and he broke my mobile, so in anger I tried to hang myself. Then another day, he beat me a lot and I tried to hang myself. Twice. People say if you try twice, the third time you'll die. If I stay with him, I'll hang myself. So, I think to myself that I can't stay. I'll go, and I'll send money every month to my mum to raise my son. But I'll never marry again. Married life is very tough. Boys say lots of things to girls but later they give lots of trouble. (Interview transcript)

Juma's plans to leave were another example of her finding ways of exerting her agency in a situation, to leave a person that she hated. She justified her decision by stating his failure as a husband, declaring him as useless. She used the extreme threat of death to demonstrate the severity of her situation. Her suicide attempts may well have been her way of asserting control as well as an expression of her distress. In this moment, she stated that she would never marry again. Juma did not move to Chittagong but did separate from her husband. She moved into another area with her aunt and visited her parents and siblings regularly. She was unable to keep her son, who moved to her husband's and his family's home. While there was stigma connected to Juma's actions, Juma was able to separate from her husband and continue to sustain herself, and she did not lose her parents' support.

Aspirations for Children

Motherhood was a central identity for the majority of the participants. Key to how they viewed their role as a mother was their aspirations for their children. Sen and Sengupta (2016) conducted research in Kolkata with female domestic workers who have a very similar culture to and share ethnicity, social class and income levels with the participants of my research. They found an overwhelming commitment to their children's education and women identified this as a method of social mobility for their children. A similar commitment and aspiration for children was evident in most of the families that I interacted with. This was often given as the very reason women chose to work. Women said that they wanted their children to have better lives than they had. They saw education as a source of betterment in life. Uday's ma had two sons who were both in school. In an interview she asserted her commitment to her children's education:

Now I can understand what education is. Then I couldn't study so I didn't study. Look, now to get a job you need to be able to give a signature. I can't do that. Not being able to read, I can't get a good job. I say to Allah, 'What's happened has

happened.' I've gotten married. Now there is no point in saying these things. Now, if my children aren't educated? Now the education that Allah has provided my children, as long as I am alive, until then, they will get an education. (Interview transcript)

Like many women, Udoy's ma compared her own situation to the life that she wanted for her children. She was unable to get employment in a garments factory because she was unable to sign her name. Other women told me that their lack of education held them back from receiving promotions within the garments industry. Furthermore, similar to Sen and Sengupta's findings, there was a belief in the intrinsic value of education.

As in the findings of Sen and Sengupta, poor quality education facilities and a lack of opportunities meant that many teenagers dropped out of school, often against their parents' wishes, either to work or to marry. When girls dropped out of school to marry they often ran away from home because their parents wanted them to remain in education. However, a number of young women did continue on to higher education and obtained jobs with a higher status, if not higher wages. These daughters were usually a great source of pride for their families. Although most families supported their daughters' education, there were some girls or young women who had to go against their families wishes to obtain the level of education that they wanted. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes describes a school award programme that I attended:

One teenager stood up and said that a couple of years ago her family wanted to get her married, but she wanted to continue with her education. Her mother then stood up and said that she also wants her daughter to study but had a lot of pressure from her husband, who has cancer, and his family. (Fieldnotes)

This girl was around 16 years old and had received financial assistance to continue with her education. Both she and her mother had come against resistance but were able to ensure that she remained in education. The sacrifices that both mothers and daughters made, even when they faced opposition, were quite remarkable. There have been huge shifts in attitudes towards girls' education, but practical obstacles remain for poor families. There are materials and tutoring costs, and children are able to earn an often much needed income for their families.

Children represented hope for the future and the possibility of achievements that seemed out of their mother's reach. During our interview, Parvin's ma turned to her daughter and said:

Look, if you hope for something, does it happen? If you grow up, get good work with a good salary... if your husband is good, good environment, with money and you think my mother has gone through a lot of hardship, now I will look after her. If that's in my fate, then it'll happen. Other than that, I can't hope for much more. But will that be my fate? (Interview transcript)

Her hope for her daughter was both a good husband and a good job, illustrating the need for both family and employment opportunities to ensure a woman's security. This was a commonly expressed sentiment. When women talked about their desires for their daughters' futures, they always mentioned wanting their daughters to marry into a respectable family and to have a decent husband. But they also wanted them to be educated and have access to work, demonstrating that attitudes towards gender roles have changed in some ways and remained the same in others. This echoes research that found the majority of people in Bangladesh believe that girls education is as important as boys (Blunch and Das 2015). The possibilities of what women could do were widening but within the traditional family structure. Furthermore, the future of Parvin's ma relied on her daughter doing well and caring for her. This was usually the role of a male children, but her severely disabled son would not be able to take on this responsibility. As there were increased opportunities for women to earn an income, more families relied on them to support them.

Wider Family

In the traditional Bangladeshi family structure, women stay with their parents until they are married and then move to their husband's home. The expectation is for male children to stay with their parents their whole lives and female children to move to their in-law's home. This structure is still the norm in most segments of Bangladeshi society. However, in the urban context it is difficult to maintain and, therefore, these family structures have adapted. Traditional systems were referred to and affected people in my area of research. Several participants had moved to their husband's village homes and lived with their in-laws, but generally these systems were not intact. Individuals often left their family homes to come to the city looking for work. They rented small rooms that are not conducive to living with an extended family. The changes that urbanisation had brought meant that people lived in nuclear family units. Most of the women I interacted with did not even live close to their in-laws, who often stayed in the villages. Furthermore, some women chose to live close to their own families rather than their in-laws.

Tamina's ma described her husband as 'good' because he moved their family unit to live near her family rather than stay with his.

A neighbouring family, with whom I ate and who lived in the same row of rooms as I did and managed the property, had both their married daughters live near them (one in the same row of rooms and one in the opposite row). One of the daughters had lived in her husband's village home with her in-laws for a few months but left because she said that she was a city girl and could not cope with living in the village and because she said that her in-laws were abusive. The wider social changes brought about by urbanisation allowed women to adapt their living arrangements. Because the living situations were already different from what would have been traditionally considered the norm, these women were able to choose to live close to their families rather than their in-laws.

Urbanisation and the cultural changes that have accompanied it have thus allowed women to choose to live close to their families. There were practical reasons for this. Their mothers often provided childcare and many in-laws lived in the villages where there was less work available. The stories above are examples of women making conscious decisions to go against normative systems and place themselves where they would receive the support that they needed. Tamina's husband lived away from his family and travelled towards them for his work. Juma and Nazrin had both tried living in the village with their in-laws and chose to leave to work in the city. Women in rural situations also left abusive in-laws to live with their families. The fact that there were so many families not living as part of larger units allowed women to live in these situations with less stigma. Furthermore, a woman like Tamina's ma, who was very religious and critical of other women who did not conform to patriarchal norms, was able to make the decision to leave her in-laws without it affecting her positive self-identity.

Core family structures including marriage and support of the wider family remained intact. However, urbanisation and women's work opportunities brought about significant changes for women. They were able to live independently from husbands and in-laws, their own families could play a greater role in their post-married life, and their aspirations for their daughters included a high level of education and a good job as well as a good marriage. Women who sold sex had many similar aspirations for family life but were less likely to fulfil them.

Women who Sold Sex

Marriage

The majority of participants who sold sex were or had been married. As illustrated in table 5, they were in a range of different types of marital relationships. Like the first group, most women were married but unlike the first group most did not live with their husbands. More sex workers admitted to being married more than once.

Marital status	Number of participants (21)
Never been married	2
Married/ had been married	19
Lived with husband	5
Lived separate from husbands, but husband visited	3
Separated from husband	8
Husband had more than one wife	4
Participant had been married more than once	5
Widowed	3
Husband in prison	1

Table 5: Marriage status of participants

There was only one woman who sold sex that I met who said that her and her husband both earned and contributed towards the cost of running their household. Women who sold sex were less likely to have a husband who fulfilled the role of provider and protector because they were not seen as deserving of protection or care due to their status as 'bad women'. Women who sold sex usually married customers who were likely to have other wives and their marriages took place outside the normal practices of involving the wider family. This resulted in women who sold sex having a greater level of independence than many other women. However, there were participants who were used by their husbands for money. I was told that women had been able to leave the sex industry through marriage. This provides a complex picture of how women were both exploited by the patriarchal systems they were in and used them to manage their situations.

It is perhaps more surprising that women who sold sex decided to marry and to remain in abusive marriages. They were outside the moral identity of a 'good' woman and, therefore,

concerns regarding reputation were less relevant. It would therefore seem that there would be less incentive to enter into marriages. Banu was a leader in the sex worker community. The sex workers' union had employed her, she was regularly involved in campaigning for sex workers' rights, and she was vocal in her criticism of the unfair society that she saw herself living in. She married a man who had been a client. In a group interview she described her marriage:

Banu: When my husband was alive, every day I had to give him 300tk for his heroin. He'd come home at 12 or 1 am. All day I'd be in the office and at night I'd work in a paper shop. I'd give my daughter 40 tk to go to school and I'd have to give her father 300 tk for his heroin. I couldn't always eat myself.

Interviewer: And why did you give the money to him?

Banu: If I didn't he would steal and go to others, and I'd feel bad, so I would give it myself. He went to jail for two years. After two years, he got out. Then the NGO said, 'If you leave your husband, we'll give you work in Chittagong' (a city in the south). They said, 'We have a question, will your daughter stay with you or not?' I said that she would stay with me. They said, 'You'll have to leave your husband', because they knew he took heroin. I said, 'Okay'. I left but every month I sent money to this landlord. Every month. Even so, he sold all my stuff without me knowing. Every month I gave the rent. I then stopped giving money. I had sent money for five months. (Interview transcript)

Banu returned to Dhaka from Chittagong after two years and nursed her husband until his death, a couple of months before I met her. She never provided an explanation of why she chose to stay in the marriage. In the first part of this excerpt she describes giving money to her husband and her daughter at the same time, and later said she 'felt bad' that he would 'steal and go to others'. These descriptions indicated that she was his carer rather than him being the 'provider' as prescribed in traditional notions of marital roles. While there was a certain amount of role reversal in this relationship, it was not an equitable one. It was hard to see how Banu benefited from the relationship. As is the case for many women who become the main earners in their families, their husbands did not take on domestic work, leaving women with a double burden of work. Banu had the additional burden of managing the destruction that her husband's addiction caused. Banu recognised that her spouse was a 'bad' husband but chose to remain in the marriage.

There were many factors to Banu's decision, including her feelings towards her husband. The fact that most women who sold sex were married suggests that despite their being outside the moral norms of most of society, they felt the need to conform in this way. Sex workers in

Bangladesh who participated in a study on unwanted pregnancy said that marriage offered them protection and a higher level of social acceptability (Katz et al. 2016). Research on sex workers in Dhaka found that participants sought protection through marriage (Haque 2011). Furthermore, marriage was one of the few ways that women who sold sex said that they were able to leave the sex industry and their stigmatised community. The only other method identified by participants was NGO work, which kept women very much within this community. However, there were women whose husbands had tricked them into selling sex and acted as their pimps. Although it allowed some women to gain a respectable status, marriage was both a means of entry into and exit from the sex industry.

Children

Most women who sold sex had identical aspirations for their children as the other participants. They wanted them to have a good education and get well-paid work. Women who sold sex tried various methods to help their children avoid the stigma that they experienced. Some women's children were brought up by family members in their village homes. Others focused on providing a good education for their children. Banu proudly told me of how she ensured that her daughter received a good education and married into a 'respectable' family:

This way I brought up my daughter. And now, with Allah's grace, I have made her. She can do everything, education, computers. She can read without looking... the Koran... everything! Fasting and prayer... everything! Everything I wanted from Allah, he gave me (She showed me a picture of her daughter). I got her married. She is very happy. They don't know that I'm a sex worker. They don't know. Only my son-in-law knows. (Interview transcript)

Banu was able to ensure that her daughter was married into a respectable family. However, she did not achieve this without difficulty. She paid a large dowry to the family and had to hide her identity. Ironically, it was her ability to be successful with her stigmatised work that allowed her daughter to take a respectable identity. Banu's work gave her the financial means to pay for her daughter to attend a decent school, where her daughter met her husband, and then to provide a dowry.

Another participant, Pinky, adopted a child and created a family for herself. She was the only participant who sold sex whose husband equally contributed to the household. She described her family to me and how she formed it:

Pinky: He (her husband) works and I work too. We both have difficulty. We have a daughter. I couldn't have children.... I've done all this... I haven't had... I haven't had (a child), so I am raising a child. I care for her very much and her father does too. She's been with us from when she was very small so all she knows is me as her mother... and her father as her father. She is one of us... no one knows or understands. I love and care for her always. Pray for us... (voice starts breaking up)... even now everyone is there... my father, step mother, brothers.

Interviewer: Do you have any communication with them?

Pinky: No, I have no contact with them. (Interview transcript)

The creation of her smaller family unit helped her deal with the loss of her wider family, which was clearly painful for her. She was able to form an 'ideal' family, in which she and her husband support and care for her daughter. They were able to achieve this despite her not being able to give birth to children, which she hinted at being a result of her involvement in selling sex. She described the sacrifices that she made for her daughter and her dreams for her future:

Every parent wants to give their child things. This is my struggle. This. I don't have any big dreams for myself... but for my daughter... if I could do for her then I could have some peace. I try. (Interview transcript)

Both Pinky and Banu gave their children lives and opportunities that they were unable to have themselves. Like other participants they had aspirations for their children to gain an education and viewed this as a method of social mobility and bettering their lives. They worked hard and made sacrifices in order to provide for their children. They clearly did not want their daughters to enter the sex industry and took measures to ensure that this did not happen. However, research suggests that they were not the norm.

The small number of studies on children of sex workers found that most daughters of sex workers enter the industry (Bernabe, 2012; Blanchet, 1996; Willis et al., 2014). Research carried out by Bernade (2012) and Blanchet (1996) were both in brothels which is a different setting from my own research. Bernade (2012) found in a brothel of 868 women and 357 children only one case of a girl marrying outside the brothel and not entering sex work. All the female children of participants of the research conducted by Willis et al (2014) on floating sex workers entered sex work. While these are small studies, they are significant. None of my participants admitted to their daughters going into the sex industry. I overheard a conversation about a mother and daughter selling sex together. The mother was referred to with disapproval and disgust. One of the participants said, 'We do this work, but how could she make her child do it!' (Fieldnotes). I

do not know whether, in reality, some of the participants' daughters did sell sex. It would have been seen in a negative light and, therefore, they may not have admitted this to me.

Willis et al. (2014) reported participants' children being sold and stolen. This was mirrored in my research findings. One of my participants described her infant son going missing. An NGO worker involved with her family was assisting her to try to find him. Another participant told me that her daughter was kidnapped while she was working. I met a participant who was pregnant. She later disappeared and when I asked about her, I was told that she had given birth to a baby and sold him. One of the participants, who said that her daughter died, was rumoured to have sold this child. The *mazar* where she sold sex was well known for being a place of contact for trafficking and selling babies. Another woman who sold sex in this area sent her son to her parents to live because she felt that it would be safer for him. Participants told me about children that they had who had died. What this suggests is that while sex workers often had high aspirations for their children, they were generally in difficult positions that made their children particularly vulnerable.

Wider Family

Relationships with wider families were the most significant difference between women who sold sex and other participants. The majority of participants who sold sex had strained or no relationship with their families. Most of these participants had had difficult childhoods and family backgrounds. Many women described entering sex work after leaving their family homes due to abuse or neglect that they experienced during their childhood. A number ran away from home due to abusive parents or stepparents. Others were sent to work in the homes of wealthier families, where they were sexually assaulted. In these ways, families often played an indirect but significant role in their entrance into the sex industry.

Once in the sex industry, if families were made explicitly aware of their work, they generally disassociated themselves. The rejection of families was often identified as one of the greatest sources of pain for participants. However, some women were able to hide their stigmatised identity from their families and kept positive relationships with them. Shaila described how she achieves this in an interview:

Interviewer: And your family in the village, do they know what you do?

Shaila: No... no one knows... my brothers, sisters, parents, no one knows that I do this work.

Interviewer: What do you say?

Shaila: I say that I live in Dhaka and do work (*chakri*).

Interviewer: Do they ever come to Dhaka?

Halima: They come...

Shaila: Yes, they come... when they come, I stay at home and I don't go anywhere... when they leave I go back to work. (Group interview)

Other research has also found that sex workers were able to hide their identities from their families in rural areas by saying that they had urban work (Katz et al. 2016; Ullah 2005). The few participants of my research who were able to keep up these relationships with wider family found it as a source of encouragement.

Participants who sold sex entered into marriage with the hope of stability, but it frequently resulted in husbands relying on their financial support. These marriages were often abusive and usually did not last. Like other women, these participants generally had high aspirations for their children. They made sacrifices and used their resources to provide opportunities for them. Most women who sold sex had difficult relationships with their wider family, and these relationships often contributed to their entrance into the sex industry. However, there were women who sold sex who were able to use their urban living situation to hide their identity.

Summary

Marriage, children and wider families were central to the majority of women's lives. Participants held traditional ideals of how families should be structured and function. However, in reality there were a large number of women-led households, none of the participants lived with their husband's families, and many women were separated from their husbands. Women had different methods of managing their situations. Having access to work and more flexible family structures enabled them to increase their independence and agency. They identified these aspects of their lives as being positive. Furthermore, aspirations for their daughters and sometimes themselves centred on getting a good education and job, rather than on their future marriage. While significant societal changes were occurring and affecting women's lives, beliefs

and structures were not dramatically transformed. Women used both their traditional beliefs and opportunities that might challenge these, in order to manage their lives.

As in other aspects of their lives, participants who sold sex experienced the extremes of other women's experience in their family life. They were more likely to be divorced, separated or married more than once. Many were rejected by their families and their children were more vulnerable to harm. Even so, like other women, they held on to ideals of the family. Most had married, and motherhood was a central part of their identity. Furthermore, Banu was able to marry her daughter into a middle-class home. Much of the fabric of family life had been disrupted for women who sold sex, whether from their childhoods or their later marriages. Nonetheless, several participants found ways of creating or re-imagining their families. They did not reject traditional forms of family and core values remained the same.

Chapter Seven: Space, Identity and Agency: Continuity and Change

Introduction

I will begin this chapter by retelling two stories from women's lives. They illustrate the dominant themes of my research: space, identity, agency, continuity, and change. Uday's ma had what was considered an ideal family. She proudly told me that her husband did not allow her to work outside the home, so she could skilfully do handiwork while being home to care for her two sons. Like other participants she held on to 'traditional' views of gender roles, including the spaces in which women should work and occupy. Her identity as a mother, wife, and 'good woman' were of central importance to her. I was therefore surprised when I overheard her telling another woman about how she had been turned away from a garments factory because they discovered that she was unable to read and write. When I asked her about this, she seemingly saw no contradiction in her previous statements regarding her husband not allowing her to work and instead concentrated on her anger towards the factory for not paying her for the three days she worked for them. Due to her social class, the changing economy and wider social changes, Uday's ma was able to make the decision to try and obtain work outside the home, but when she failed to be employed she saw the benefits of her position in light of beliefs regarding women's positions. She was able to hold two seemingly contradictory ideologies at once and to use them for her advantage.

Banu was also proud of her position. She was an impressive fighter for sex workers' rights. She toured the city performing in dramas to raise awareness of the issues that sex workers face, met with community leaders and spoke at international conferences. She was a leader and campaigner for her community. However, when it came to her daughter's in-laws, she hid her identity as a sex worker. Despite her beliefs and extensive work, she had to negotiate this stigmatised identity so that her daughter could maintain a respectable identity. She occupied a space where she could capitalise on her identity as a sex worker, which included the world of NGOs and the social changes that they hoped to bring about. She chose to be part of activities that improved the situation of herself and her community, but she also chose to assist and enable her daughter to lead a life outside this community, adhering to wider social norms.

In this chapter, I explore how participants like Uday's ma and Banu occupied spaces, managed identities, utilised their agency and were participants in societal changes. Furthermore, I consider how they were subject to social structures that were beyond their control and adhered to seemingly contradictory belief systems. I argue that while underlying views on women remained intact, there had been significant changes for women. Women were actively part of these changes but also skilfully navigated them to reduce the risk of harm and to maintain positive relationships with their communities and families. In doing so they were exercising their agency in complex ways. As a social work researcher, I am interested in how interventions and policies can best bring positive social change in the lives of women. Therefore, it is essential to consider why and how women accept or reject change. Understanding the situation of women who sell sex highlights the risks for women who live outside of, or who do not adhere to, accepted societal norms.

I begin this chapter by considering both the similarities and differences of women who sell sex and those in other forms of work. I go on to discuss how participants interacted with the different spaces that they occupied. I explore the different identities that women hold and how this affects their experiences. The subject of participants' agency and resistance is then discussed, exploring the ways women are able to exercise agency in oppressive situations. I consider the multiple ideologies that affect women's lives, how and why women choose to hold on to some, reject others and retain seemingly contradictory points of view. I end the chapter with a discussion on the ways that women resist and manage their social positions. I argue that women draw from the means available to them, including different ideologies, to manage and improve their and their children's situations, within restrictive social and economic structures.

Comparing Participants

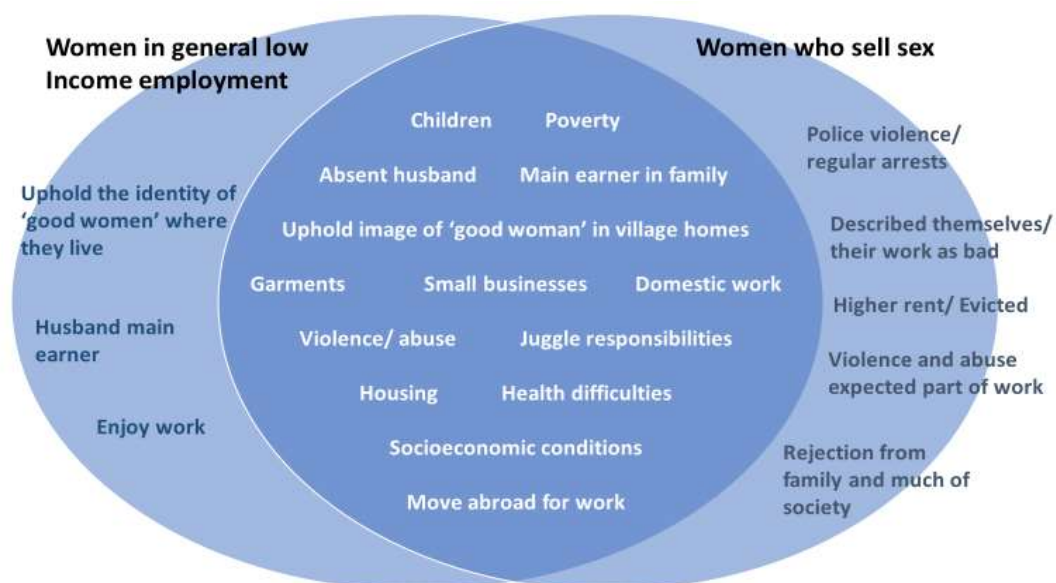


Figure 2: Venn diagram illustrating similarities and differences of participants' experiences

The Venn diagram above (Figure 2) includes the different aspects of life that participants regularly discussed with me in our conversations and interviews. I separated them into three categories: subjects that were mentioned by both groups, those that were only raised by women in general low income employment and those which were raised only by women who sell sex. For example, not all women who sell sex were rejected by their families, but a number were, and no women in other forms of low income employment described this as one of their experiences. As illustrated in the Venn diagram, participants who sold sex and those in other forms of work had many similarities including forms of work, economic status and some aspects of family life. However, there were also several stark differences. Women who sold sex generally faced the extreme ends of other women's experiences. While many women suffered violence and abuse, for sex workers it was an expected part of their work. They faced stigma, police violence and higher levels of rent, and many were rejected by their families.

Although I distinguish the two groups by whether they were involved in a particular type of work – the sale of sex – there were a number of overlaps in terms of other work that they were involved in and how they experienced their work. Almost half of the participants who had sold sex had engaged in domestic work and three had worked in garments factories before entering

the sex industry. One participant stopped selling sex to become a domestic worker. Another participant ran a stall after leaving sex work. One participant both sold sex and ran a stall. Women in both groups were often the main earner in their family, experienced violence or exploitation through their work and juggled their work with other responsibilities such as running their household. However, while in other forms of work violence was experienced, it was not viewed as inevitable. None of the participants who sold sex had husbands who were the main contributors of finances for their families, although one participant said that she and her husband were equal earners. No woman who sold sex said that they enjoyed doing this work.

All participants had several common identities. They were Bengali Muslims who considered themselves 'poor' and had similar socioeconomic positions. Apart from two homeless women who sold sex, they lived in the similar types of housing. Most participants from both groups were wives and mothers. Participants in general low-income employment were concerned with their moral identities, but they were able to maintain their identities as being a 'good woman', even when they pushed the boundaries of accepted social norms. They negotiated and resisted some of the restraints placed on them by society. Several women who sold sex were also able to maintain an identity as 'good women' in their villages but had a 'spoilt' identity where they lived in Dhaka city. Because of their stigmatised identities most participants who sold sex had experienced being evicted from their homes. Even those living in the southern area, where there had been activist activities to bring housing security, were charged higher amounts of rent. Sex workers self-identified as 'bad' women and many were rejected by their families. The effects of these extreme experiences of women in sex work were multifaceted. For one group of women who identified themselves as sex workers, there was a strong sense of common identity and, to a certain extent, resistance against the consequences of their social status. They were involved in organisations and activities that were trying to change society's view of them and improve their living and working conditions.

Mobility and access of certain spaces was an experience shared by all women, though to differing levels. Systems of *purdah* and how they were practically worked out affected all aspects of participants' lives. Women working in their homes and communities maintained rules of *purdah*, though these were changing. In the urban environment women lived in close proximity to men who were not part of their families. However, women stayed within their communities

unless there was a specific reason to leave. Work in garments factories did bring women out of their communities but generally within walking distance and for a specific reason. Women running small shops or stalls also did so within or in very close proximity to their communities. There were connotations to being on the street that were directly related to prostitution. Participants commented that if you were on the streets people would think that you are doing 'bad' work. Women who sold sex occupied these stigmatised spaces; they defined the very nature of their work.

Space

Women and *Purdah*

Forms of *purdah* are the reality for most women in Bangladesh, restricting the spaces that they are allowed to occupy (Cain et al., 1979; Feldman, 2001; Nazneen, 1996). The purpose of *purdah* is to ensure women's sexual purity in order to maintain social order and avoid shame being brought onto families (Rozario 1992). The ways that *purdah* is practised differs according to geographical area, socioeconomic status and family beliefs. Women in lower socioeconomic groups are unable to keep strict forms of *purdah* because of the need to work and lack of resources needed to keep complete separation of the sexes. This was the case for all my research participants. Their homes were in such close proximity to men from outside their immediate family that it would be impossible to avoid having contact with them. However, *purdah* in the form of a general segregation of the sexes was practised (ibid).

The decisions that people make are dictated by 'moral frameworks' and are constructed by values, social norms and identities (M. A. Hossain 2012). Cultural norms and rules were part of participants' value systems and identities. They dictated women's behaviour. However, cultural norms are not static. Over the past four decades, women in Bangladesh have increasingly left their homesteads for work, and most of my participants were part of this change. Even so, this was not a straightforward movement towards women's empowerment. Involvement in work outside the home was high because of their low socioeconomic status, and their mobility continued to be governed by a strict set of rules (Shelley Feldman 2001; Rozario 1992).

As is generally the case in Bangladesh, homes of my research participants were women's domain (S. C. White 2017). Participants' husbands often just slept, ate and occasionally watched TV at home. In the majority of houses in my neighbourhood, men spent little time in their homes. Many men worked late and socialised at tea shops with other men. Domestically there was a general segregation between men and women as well as outside the home. However, urban situations brought unrelated women and men into close proximity. I was surprised by how often this was accepted and unquestioned. For example, women washed fully clothed, but their modesty was compromised as bathing took place in public spaces in view of men outside their family. The same women might wear a *burqa* to travel. When not washing to not have a scarf draped across the chest was considered highly immodest. The fact was that a neighbour was less likely to harass a woman in her own space than they were to harass a stranger who was on a street. Relationships and socially accepted spaces directed men's behaviour towards women, and consequently influenced women's behaviour to protect themselves. Women preferred to be in spaces where they felt comfortable and safe, and this helped maintain practices of *purdah*.

Even so, there is an increasing trend throughout Bangladesh of girls and women leaving their homes to go to school and work. There are higher rates of female enrolment in secondary schools in Bangladesh than there is male (N. Asadullah and Wahhaj 2012). Participants reflected these social changes with a large number of women working outside the home and all participants sending their daughters to school. However, there were real consequences for women moving in male dominated spaces. Women were often harassed when they walked the streets and their moral status was questioned. When women's mobility increased, research recorded growing rates of harassment, including violence, experienced by women and girls (E. H. Chowdhury 2005; Siddiqi 2006). Husbands provided a certain level of protection for women. Kabeer (1997) observed:

In the context of Bangladesh, a striking feature of gender subordination is the extent to which women rely on male protection as much as they rely on male provision. Consequently, there is a social as well as an economic dimension to female dependence. (296)

A number of participants experienced violence by their husbands, so this protection was not simply from violence. There was a greater level of shame that came from violence outside the

home and married women were less likely to generate gossip from the attention they received than single women were (S. C. White 2017). Even so, compared to thirty years previously, there were a greater number of girls and young women who had relationships outside marriage and found ways of meeting with men in public places. These relationships were often brought to parents who then organised their weddings (ibid). Several of the younger participants described this process of how their marriage arrangements were carried out. Most had met and chosen their husbands before involving their parents to formalise arrangements. Both for work and to a lesser extent pleasure, women were expanding the spaces that they occupied. However, there were risks involved in doing so and women therefore had to find ways of managing these risks.

The *Burqa*

One of the methods of managing these risks was the adoption of the *burqa* (Rozario 2006; S. C. White 2017). The *burqa* is relatively new in Bangladesh, gaining popularity over the past three decades. It has been adopted by women for various reasons including the influence of the Middle East and the type of Islam associated with that part of the world (Rozario 2006). Research has found that it can increase women's mobility by allowing movement in new spaces while maintaining women's respectability (N. Asadullah and Wahhaj 2012; Rozario 2006; S. C. White 2017). In my research, the only research participants that consistently wore *burqas* were teachers who were also university students. Some other participants would occasionally wear them when they were travelling or visiting people outside their neighbourhood. I asked the teachers why they wore the *burqa*. They gave different reasons, including the religious beliefs of their families or themselves. One of the teachers with whom I spent a lot of time said that she used to wear a *burqa* to go to university because of convenience. She told me that she did not have enough money for new clothes and wearing one garment that covered her clothes allowed her to wear what she wanted. She used this clothing to hide her social status. White (2017) describes how being a teacher was considered a form of outside work that increased a woman's status, and this was partly due to the fact that she could carry out this job while wearing a *burqa*. It both demonstrated modesty and a higher social status.

Digital Spaces

Technology was a method used by women to expand the space that they occupied. Huang (2018) explored the effects of technology on young women in rural Bangladesh. She found that

through mobile phone relationships and the internet women were exposed to new ideas and were able to test boundaries. They were also forced to reconsider issues closer to home such as the practices of *purdah*. Consequently, they faced an ethical struggle in trying to decide what their values and social norms meant when physical boundaries were removed. Young women who participated in my research met men through 'miss-call' dating (a way of meeting people through calling phone numbers at random) and were exposed to new worlds through Facebook. I overheard women having phone calls with men whom they did not physically meet. Older women told me that they were concerned when girls were on their mobile phones too much.

Technology provided new spaces where relationships could be formed with less risk than meeting in person. However, technology brought with it a new set of challenges. An example that I previously gave illustrates this point. Banu, a sex worker, told me how her *hijira* (transgender) friend befriended her son-in-law on Facebook and started stalking him. She described how embarrassed she was by the situation and how she had to ask her friend to stop his advances. It was another space in which she had to navigate her identity. One of my neighbours found out that her husband 'liked' a woman's picture on Facebook and this caused an argument between them. She told me that she did not understand Facebook, but it still affected her world. It was a new space that her husband was using, and she was afraid that he would use it to access other women.

Work Spaces

Participants described their work by where it occurred, either within or outside their homes and communities. Most women stated that they preferred to work from home as this allowed them to manage their household and avoid the hardship of 'outside' work. The early literature exploring reasons for women's low level of involvement in the labour force focussed on patriarchal practices of *purdah* that prevented women from independent movement outside their homesteads (Cain, Khanam, and Nahar 1979; S Feldman and McCarthy 1983). Research carried out by Bridges et al. (2011) argued that prevailing *purdah* norms continued to be a major influence on women's participation in the labour market. It highlighted the fact that ultra-poor women were more likely to work, a high school education lowered the prevalence of work, and married women were less likely to work (Bridges, Lawson, and Begum 2011). In some ways, my research reflects these findings; married women who chose to work outside the home

generally did so because their husbands had abandoned them or were not supporting them. However, the rise in unmarried women involved in employment outside the home suggests that work has caused some significant changes. This group, who would have previously remained at home to protect their social and moral status, were now working outside the home for economic gain (Heintz, Kabeer, and Mahmud 2017).

My findings clearly illustrate that other people's perceptions were key to how women experienced and chose their work. Women stated that they would do street-based work if it was not for the negative comments that they would receive from their community. Furthermore, work outside their communities was associated with hardship and abuse. Participants said that they did not want to do domestic work or work in garments factories because they would be shouted at, reflecting societal views on outside work. However, many women who were involved in these forms of work were positive about their work. Although women were affected by the prevailing *purdah* norms when making decisions about work, particularly in the context of outside work, these were not necessarily internalised by women. They were changing and could be overruled by increased social status or financial gain. As in other similar research, participants reported having their own independent income, wherever it was earned, as increasing their agency and bettering their position in society (Heintz, Kabeer, and Mahmud 2017).

A large study on female labour involvement, the Pathways to Women's Empowerment, was carried out with 5198 women in eight districts of Bangladesh (Kabeer, Mahmud, and Tasneem 2011). This research found that contrary to many official figures, the majority of women (67% to 73%) did participate in the labour force. The large discrepancy is due to the fact that much of female labour is carried out in women's homes and this is more difficult to detect. The study found that 48% of the participation was home-based and only 10% was outside paid work. The high level of female employment is reflected in my research, though even higher due to women being of low social status and urban based, which were both factors that increased the likelihood of women being part of the labour force (Bridges, Lawson, and Begum 2011; Heintz, Kabeer, and Mahmud 2017). Like my participants, the research found that women stated that they preferred to be able to work from home and the least desirable forms of work were forms of employment outside the home (domestic work 32%, daily labour 23%, begging 14% and garments factory work 12%). The reasons for not wanting to do these forms of work were the

difficult conditions, the spaces in which work occurred and negative community responses to these types of work. The views of others played a key role:

That the views of others are an important consideration in dictating women's labour market preferences is evident when we consider that the main reason for giving a high rank to teaching, despite its outside location, is that it was honoured within the community. Similarly, while the main reason for giving a low rank to domestic service, despite the fact that it closely resembled the work women did within the home, was the awareness of its low status within the community. It thus appears that the social prestige attached to an occupation could offset some of the concerns associated with working outside the home, just as the social opprobrium attached to an occupation could offset the advantages of working within the domestic domain. (Heintz et al., 2017:19)

Understanding the importance of whether work took place outside or inside a woman's community, and the impact that this had on women's lives, helps us to better appreciate the position of women in street-based sex work. Women who sold sex had the dual stigma of working in spaces that were considered shameful for women and the type of work that they engaged in being viewed as morally corrupt. Their work was automatically stigmatised because of where it took place. Other women avoided street-based work because they would be assumed to be involved in selling sex. Outside work was associated with hardship and mistreatment. Women who sold sex experienced the extremes of this abuse.

Spaces and restrictions on the places women were allowed to occupy were a key part of how women experienced and made decisions about their lives. Reputation and a desire to be in good social standing prevented women from doing 'outside work' even if they would otherwise have chosen to. Even so, women were challenging the boundaries of space and place through work, technology and finding techniques to manage their movements. The places women occupied directly affected their identities and women's identities were an essential part of their experience.

Identity

Social Status

The spaces that participants occupied defined their identity. In the first group, participants viewed people who lived in *bostis* as 'us' and those who lived in apartment buildings as the 'other'. Their low social status was manifested in their housing and gave them a sense of belonging, an identity. Participants from the second group shared this socioeconomic identity

but added to it the shame of their work, which occurred in the highly stigmatised space of 'the streets'. Figure 3 illustrates the different layers of women's identity and its place regarding their social status. All participants had a low-class status. They were all female, which lowered their status further. Participants who sold sex had a particularly low position due to their stigmatised identity. The intersectionality of their identities is important to understand their positions. For example, the way participants experienced gender discrimination was different from large sections of Bangladeshi women because of their social class.

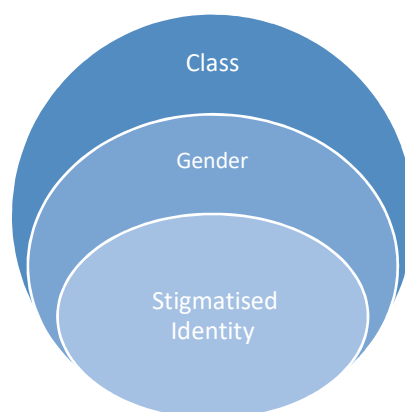


Figure 3: Diagram illustrating multiple levels of participants' identities

Participants contrasted their social group with those who had wealth and social status, defined as people who lived in apartment buildings who were considered rich. They contrasted 'them' and 'us' by painting the 'rich' in a negative light. They often complained of how people with wealth had too much and were not generous. These are typical methods groups use to distinguish themselves (Hornsey 2008). By defining who belonged in their group, they situated themselves in society and who they belonged to within it (Weekes 1991).

Being part of a social class gave participants a sense of belonging, but it also had to be managed. For example, a mother tried to teach her daughter to not participate in behaviour associated with her class because actions that reflect a more affluent class would improve her wellbeing and broaden her opportunities. This demonstrates how identities are fluid and can be negotiated. Attempts to separate individual identities from social identities were a method of managing stigma (Snow and Anderson, 1987). However, emulating a higher status was an attempt to improve the situation of this participant's daughter, rather than a rejection of

community. Identities are often complex and conflicting. It was important for participants to both remain part of their social group and manage the negative effects of being part of it.

Place Identity

The impact of place to women's identities was considered in the 'Space' section of this chapter and I will therefore not repeat the discussion here. However, in this identity section, it is worth pointing out some key influences of place on identity. Discursive understandings of place identity considers the social meanings given to places, often through conversation, and the implications these have for social life (Dixon and Durrheim 2000). An important part of the identities of women who sold sex, and an identity that other women tried to avoid, was their association to the streets. The social meanings placed on 'the streets' resulted in any woman who worked there being morally suspect. They were described as a place that polluted women's purity. These moral implications limited women's actions and, therefore, were a form of social control. Furthermore, the association that women who sold sex had to the streets was used to exclude them and to justify abusive treatment of them. Similarly, but to a lesser degree, being part of the *bosti* was discussed as having a stigma attached. Identities were formed and reinforced by the social meanings attached to the places that women occupied. Place identity explains that individuals' identities are inextricably linked to where they go, and this is used to justify how they are treated.

Moral Identity

Participants' gender identity affected all aspects of their lives, particularly in relation to their moral identities. Women were more likely to experience domestic violence, they were restricted in the spaces that they could occupy, and they were particularly conscious of ensuring that their behaviour was socially acceptable in order to maintain the identity of a 'good' woman, whenever possible. Participants adhered to these restrictions, and taught their daughters to do so, largely due to their desire to remain part of their communities. These communities offered a sense of belonging, protection and often assistance when in extreme need. They therefore had a powerful influence over women's lives and decision making.

Ethnographic research carried out by Lynch (2007) on garments workers in rural areas of Sri Lanka explored the workers' newly-formed identities. Drawing on Mahmood's (2005) ideas of

agency, Lynch argues that their reasons for choosing to work in garments factories were not simply financial; they also sought to fulfil diverse social goals. A key concern of the factory workers was being perceived as 'good women' because working outside the home and working for 'Western' organisations threatened this identity. However, while avoiding negative identities, they took on new identities and learned new skills through their experiences as workers outside their home situations. Lynch describes this process as 'creatively responding to the world around them' (49). The behaviours that were permitted for a 'good girl' were being broadened. The women had more freedom and disposable income. They were 'negotiating how to live a feminine ideal in a complex social world' (35).

Another ethnographic study also carried out in Sri Lanka, this time by Hewamanne (2016), found that many women who worked in garments factories in an urban area diverged from sexual norms while maintaining family links and fulfilling marital duties. Hewamanne describes how women negotiated their sexual freedom despite attempts by patriarchal systems to control and 'save' them. She notes that the urban spaces in which they were allowed to exercise these freedoms were temporary, with most women returning to their villages to marry both in order to maintain social norms and because factory policy encouraged women to leave after five years of work. These women were stigmatised because they were living outside traditional forms of male guardianship. The real and exaggerated stories of female garment workers' sexual activities caused moral outrage among Sri Lankan media and other groups, furthering the stigma women faced. Hewamanne describes how women both challenged and managed their internalised views on morality.

My own findings resonate with the experiences described both by Lynch in 2007 and again by Hewamanne in 2016. The importance of maintaining an identity as a 'good woman' was crucial for a place in society for women in most types of employment. Managing behaviour that deviated from women's ideal behaviour was explained and justified, while upholding the notions of a 'good woman'. The group that were not able to uphold the identity of a 'good woman' were women who sold sex. They were already labelled by society and themselves as 'bad women'. A conceptual understanding of the identities of women who sold sex provides more meaning to this label.

Spoilt Identities

The communities of women who sold sex were based on their exclusion from other communities and common experiences of work as well as geographical location. Their perceived moral failings resulted in experiences of extreme stigma affecting where they were able to live and who would mix with them socially. Sex workers developed various methods to manage their 'spoilt identities' (Goffman, 1963). As found in other research, women had to manage their communities in a way that enabled them to conceal their identity when advantageous for them (Ullah 2005) in relation to their families and when living in communities that would reject them if their occupation was discovered. However, due to the rejection that they faced by other communities, they formed their own communities. Goffman (1963) describes the importance of these communities to legitimise stigmatised identities, creating a shared sense of worth and loyalty. There was a distinctive difference between the women I met who sold sex and were part of well-formed and organised sex worker groups and those who were not. The former group had secure housing and a stronger support network. The lives of latter group were characterised by insecurity and they had less support. One participant from this group told me that she would not inform fellow women who sold sex where she lived because they might reveal her identity to her neighbours. She did not trust other women who sold sex and tried to distance herself from this community.

NGOs were heavily involved, providing access to more powerful, often international groups. For some women who sold sex, their stigmatised identity aligned them with a global movement, which provided a wider identity and source of positive self-esteem. They were more likely to be involved in resistance movements, although these had to be skilfully managed in order to be effective. I attended a drama that participants were part of that toured the city to raise awareness of the difficulties that sex workers faced and how they were treated. They performed at a large international conference and were involved in petitioning to local leaders to allow them to live in the area. They were much more visibly involved in fighting for their rights than the first group of participants. The movements that they were involved in were part of the legacy of the sex workers' movement in the early 2000s. Chowdhury (2006) described the reconstruction of sex workers' identities during this movement from considering themselves 'fallen' women to activists. Rhetoric was used by women who sold sex that had its origins in NGO involvement. For example, Haque (2011) used quotes from one of his participants in which she compared

her job to a physician providing treatment. This was close to the exact words one of my participants used. Women who sold sex shared justifications for their work and felt the need to defend their role in society. They developed narratives that were used to manage their stigmatised identities and use it for their advantage.

I found that a number of participants reflected this more positive identity, but their identities were not completely transformed. While they were passionate about their rights and offered justification for their work, they held on to negative beliefs about their work. They viewed themselves as part of the identity of 'bad women' which was distinct from 'good people'. Although they may not have completely internalised the belief systems behind the rights-based movements, they were involved with them because they had more to gain and less to lose than other women. The violence and stigma that they faced was stark, and they had looser ties with family that would be shamed by being active in visible spaces. Furthermore, sex work and prostitution are subjects that fascinate international organisations and media. They used their 'spoilt' identities to access services and powerful actors for their advantage.

Agency

Choices Regarding Work

The types of work that women chose and the decisions they made regarding employment were complex and varied. Figure 4 illustrates the various macro and micro factors that contribute to women's decisions. In the flowchart, I put together the different reasons that women gave me for their employment and organised them according to whether causes occurred at an international, national, or individual level. The flowchart demonstrates that there are various influences involved in governing whether women enter the labour force. The vast majority were outside women's control. However, within the enormous global and national determining factors, women found small yet significant spaces to carve out their own stories. There were factors that depended on women's personal choices and how they chose to navigate the situations that they were in. My research reflects and builds on the work of Kabeer (2000). She argued, from her research on Bangladeshi garments factory workers that, when considering women's choices regarding employment, both wider structural factors and individual agency must be considered. She found that although women were bound by social structures and patriarchal systems, they were not passive in their positions and actively made decisions.

The flowchart illustrates these influences and how women's agency interacts with wider structural factors. Climate change and multinational companies (MNC) occur at a global level and directly affect national issues. Land erosion has caused the loss of land leading to migration to Dhaka. Global demands for cheap clothing brought multinational companies to Bangladesh to set up factories. There were further reasons for women's involvement in low income employment at a national level such as the high population and lack of educational facilities that would give them access to more skilled jobs. At an individual level, women made decisions to enter employment based on their family situation and family needs as well as personal preferences. Individual agency played a part but existed within and interacted with these broader structures. Furthermore, different factors affected each other. The arrows point both ways between 'national garments companies that supply MNCs' and 'low income employment in Dhaka' because multinational companies both come to Dhaka because there is low income employment and they create low income employment. The wages are low because of the wider lack of jobs in Dhaka. The fact that that this employment provides low wages fuels migration abroad to countries where salaries are higher.

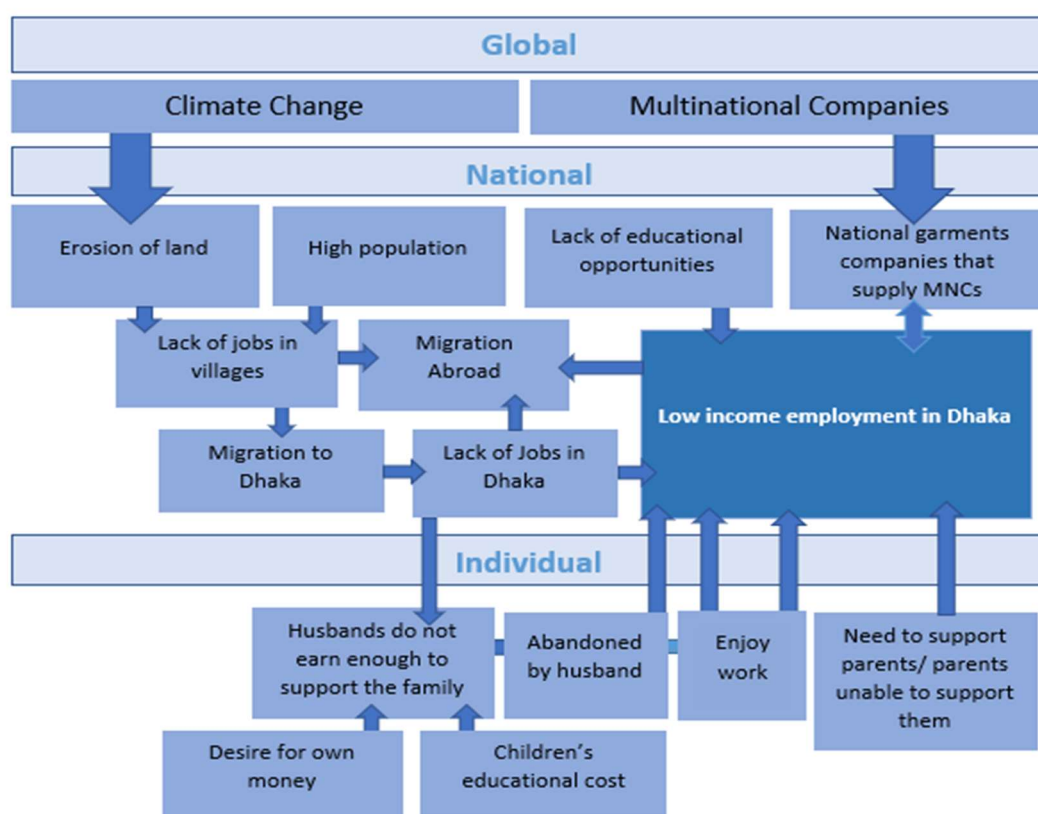


Figure 4: Flow chart illustrating reasons participants gave for engaging in urban work

The flow chart (figure 4) lays out the multiple and interlinked influences on participants' decision making regarding their involvement in employment. There was clearly a complex mixture of factors that determined and influenced women. While the majority of factors were out of women's control, there were several ways women asserted their agency. Women who sold sex existed within these wider structural realities and were therefore affected by the same issues. Some had migrated to Dhaka due to land erosion or the possibility of a job in the city. However, women who sold sex rarely described their entry into the sex industry as an individual personal choice. They had either been sexually assaulted, sold, tricked or found themselves destitute. Nonetheless, they did explicitly state reasons for continuing to sell sex in terms of personal choice. This was often for similar reasons to other women, that they needed to support themselves and their children and that their husbands did not earn enough money or had abandoned them. Additional reasons were beliefs regarding not being able to reverse their stigmatised identity and choosing to work for themselves rather than allowing another person to control them. Within oppressive situations, women who sell sex are able to find ways of utilising their agency (Sariola 2010).

Agency and Exploitation

Mahmood's (2005) understanding of agency is relevant to the experiences of all my participants. Exercising agency involved women making day-to-day decisions that could seem to go against women's interests but were ways of managing their lives. Some participants chose to wear conservative clothes or restrict their movements. While these decisions may seem to be going against women's interest, they were utilising their agency within a specific context and history. My research reflects the argument of Madhok (2013b) that agency is not synonymous with autonomy. Women used their agency to make decisions regarding what would cause the least harm and how they could manage the oppressive situations that they found themselves in. Agency often was utilised in the form of strategies to cope with suffering and oppression (Banerjee 2017; Madhok 2013b). Strategies that participants used included avoiding places where they would experience harassment or wearing a *burqa*, utilising structures within communities for their protection, and encouraging their children's education. Access to an income was a key strategy that women used to manage their situations. However, it was also a source of exploitation.

I witnessed and heard about the exploitative work situations of the garments factories that often receive attention in the international media (Banerjee Saxena 2014; Kabeer 2004). Many women worked long hours in harsh working conditions for low levels of pay. Women involved in informal work had little opportunity to demand better conditions or fairer pay (Kabeer, Milward, and Sudarshan 2013). However, participants also talked about the benefits and increased agency gained from their work. Women discussed enjoying their work and the ability to have their own income. Furthermore, work was viewed as a method for female children to gain social mobility. Both agency and exploitation existed as intrinsic parts of women's experiences of work. It is important to understand these two coexisting aspects of women's experiences to gain a complete picture of the impact of work on women's lives (Madhok, et al. 2013).

Like the participants in the study of sex workers carried out by Alam and Faiz (2012) the participants of my research who sold sex called their work 'bad' and defended their right to work. They both took on a negative view of their work and the rights-based justification for their work. In the literature review, I argued that the sex work verses prostitution debate is too simplistic. The industry clearly involves both exploitation and women utilising their agency. The demographics of women who sell sex are too broad and experiences too varied to make binary conclusions. Participants of my research described both experiences of exploitation and choosing their work, though they were forthright in explaining that this was a limited choice. The majority described experiences of childhood rape, abuse or being sold into the industry. At the same time, women also talked about being workers and providing a service.

While in the literature these two narratives are separated, and one given more importance than the other, for the participants both narratives were essential elements of their experiences as women who sold sex. In the same conversation, a participant would passionately talk about her right to work and then describe how she had saved many girls from the industry, that she had helped them become 'good'. She also helped other women to sell sex through distributing condoms and fighting for their rights. While these may seem like conflicting points of view, in the participant's mind they were not. For example, a participant's experience of being raped as a child was a key cause of her entering the sex industry because it gave her a spoilt identity. She continued to feel the effects of this stigmatised identity while believing in the legitimacy of her work. She and her fellow women who sold sex faced extreme violence, had been put in

prison and were excluded from mainstream society. At the same time, she gained independence, was able to support her daughter, was given a responsible job and spoke at international conferences. Therefore, she both wanted to prevent young girls from entering an industry that she knew from personal experience was extremely difficult, and she wanted to improve the conditions of women who sold sex and fight for their right to work. She had clearly had an exploitative experience that brought her into her work, but she used her work to increase her agency.

Ideologies and Belief Systems

The ways women chose to assert their agency was influenced by the ideologies and the cultural belief systems that they adhered to. There were multiple and seemingly conflicting ideologies and beliefs that affected women. For example, a participant explained she and her neighbours celebrated a *Shiite* (Muslim minority group) festival as they traditionally did despite being *Sunnis* (the branch of Islam that is dominant in Bangladesh) and being told not to by the *huzur* (religious teacher). The neighbour chose to ignore a certain type of *Sunni* teaching associated with influences from the Middle East. However, she regularly watched TV teaching the same ideology and followed the instructions not to celebrate birthdays. She sent her daughter to an Islamic teacher to learn Arabic and the Quran. She also sent her daughter to the school run by an NGO holding a 'rights-based' ideology associated with the West. She talked about wanting her daughter to gain a good education to help her attain a 'good job', but this did not take away the central importance that she placed on her daughter finding a husband and having children. There were 'traditional' Bengali cultural beliefs, as well as newer Islamic and Western ideologies, at play in her decision making.

Generally, I define ideologies as an intellectual construction and cultural belief systems as a social product of a society (Reza 2003). However, I recognise that this distinction suggests that these belief systems are distinctive and conclusive but, in reality, they are constantly changing and overlap. Over the past forty years Bangladesh has been profoundly influenced by development ideologies widely introduced through NGOs (Lewis 2010) and Islamist ideologies from international movements (A. A. Hossain 2012). For all participants, to varying degrees, their Muslim faith and communal identity contributed to their world view. However, this varied greatly for different women. For example, women who sold sex would cover their head when

they heard the *azaan* (call to prayer) and regularly asked for prayer but also engaged in illicit sexual relationships that other women deemed un-Islamic.

Kirmani (2009) argues that it is misleading to assume that religious identity is experienced in a single way or to fail to recognise the great diversity in regards to how Islam is believed and practiced. Religious identity is intermingled with various other identities such as regional identification, class/status, family, marital status and age. White (2010) asks the question, 'Does Islam empower women?' (334,) and attempts to answer it through conversations with two religious Bangladeshi women. She found that women have diverse views on both gender and religion, and therefore understandings of Islam cannot be separated from wider geopolitical influences. She argues that while Islam could be personally beneficial, there was a lack of exploration of the politics of self. For example, under-explored issues include the effect that women taking personal decisions to further their personal devotion has on others, such as non-Muslim women, and how personal belief systems are used by others to undermine women's positions.

In most forms of ideologies, women have been placed in a disadvantaged position. However, women equally use different ideologies for their own advantage. Madhok (2013b) describes how *sathins*, women who were employed by NGOs to carry out development work in north-west India, interacted with the NGO ideology that they were given:

Their encounters with rights does not result in a replacement of the 'original' moral framework but leading instead to a very complex arrangement of 'old' ideas together with a group of newly selected ideas. The *sathins* have markedly critical perspectives on oppressive social relations and have absorbed, interpreted and reformulated ideas about human rights in ways appropriate to their lives and communities to their interests as best they can.(6)

Madhok describes here how women can be critical of the different ideologies that they are confronted with. They make sense of them and adapt them to their situations. My participants encountered ideologies from various sources throughout their lives and asserted their agency in deciding which parts to take on and which ones to ignore.

There are complex reasons why women make the decisions that they do: a combination of teachings making sense to them, negative consequences of not conforming and affirmation from

a sense of meaning or belonging. Women often loved their husbands, passionately believed in their role as mothers and found a sense of belonging and meaning in their religious faith. They therefore adhered to ideologies that may be considered conservative. The 'liberal' ideologies of NGOs offered access to power and new opportunities. Therefore, women took on some of the beliefs that this ideology offered. In this light, I view conformity to cultural belief systems or ideologies as a strategy that women use to navigate their lives and promote their relational wellbeing (White 2017). I recognise that these beliefs were not held in isolation and the ideologies that women chose to engage with affected more than just the individual holding them (S. C. White 2010). Along with participants' identities as women and Muslims, their social class was a key factor influencing how they saw the world.

Resistance and Conformity

Participants were part of communities that lacked social status or wealth. They talked about being 'poor' and complained that people in more powerful positions did not help them. They recognised many of the injustices that their communities faced and exercised 'weapons of the weak' described by Scott (1985). These 'weapons' included complaints and other subtle forms of non-compliance. Scott's description of the relationship between the rich and poor in his research site in rural Malaysia, though a very different setting, resonates with mine:

Those with power in the village are not, however, in total control of the stage. They may write the basic script for the play, but within its confines, truculent or disaffected actors find sufficient room to manoeuvre to suggest subtly their disdain for the proceedings. (1985: 26)

It is this 'room to manoeuvre' that I find particularly important to understand with regards to how women negotiate their positions in their communities and wider society. It was in these spaces that women were able to utilise their agency and perform acts of 'everyday resistance' (ibid). Resisting the prevailing social orders is one way women can utilise their agency. The methods in which women resist their class position must be seen within the confines that gender places on them and the multiple identities that they possess (Hart, 1991). Hart's critique of Scott's work, and his theory's application to gender, emphasises how people sharing a class identity also have many other identities, and that beliefs regarding gender are internalised to a certain extent, shaping how women respond to their situations. While women stated that experiences such as violence from their husband were unfair, they also made gender specific statements about how women should behave and justified violence against women in certain circumstances. Like

Mahmood (2005), I found that women often chose to maintain certain restrictions on their behaviour because of their beliefs. Furthermore, adhering to behaviours that allowed them to maintain relationships gave participants social capital that they would otherwise have lost. Remaining in an abusive marriage was a common example of this.

However, participants did exercise resistance to their social positions (ibid). Like Hewamanne (2016) discovered through her research with garments workers in Sri Lanka, I found that participants often negotiated their gendered positions without directly challenging them. While they conformed to the class and gender norms of their communities, they applied coping techniques to manage them and performed everyday forms of resistance, and some were involved in explicit resistance. I will discuss these responses through the examples laid out in figure 5.

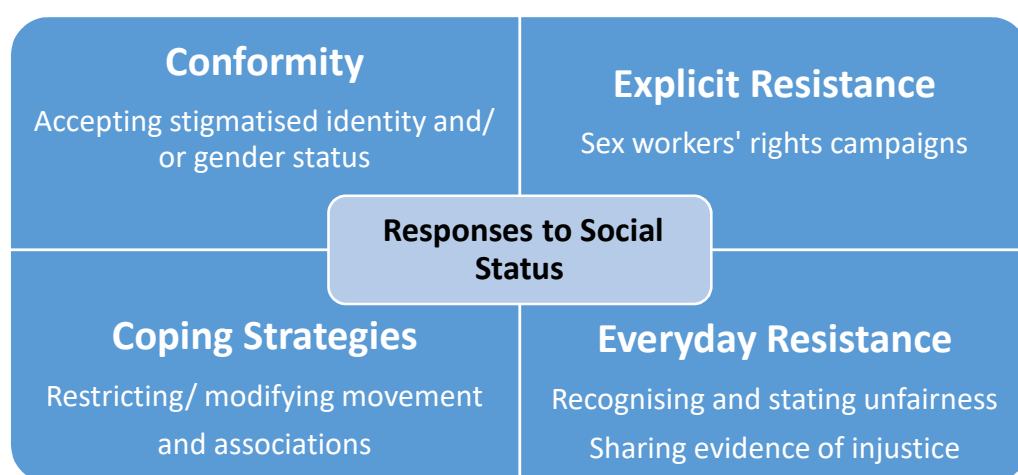


Figure 5: Diagram illustrating women's responses to their social position

Conformity and Coping Techniques

Conformity and coping techniques are closely related and often indistinguishable. The distinction that I make is that, when I refer to conformity, it is the wider ideology that women take on whereas coping techniques are more specific actions that are used by women to manage their situations. Women adopted belief systems and ideologies that may have seemed to go against their interests and signify that they bought into narratives that justify their oppression (Mahmood 2005). However, choices and belief systems are complex. Many participants believed in ideologies about their role as a mother and wife because this gave them a sense of belonging and purpose. Equally, women made practical choices to maintain 'good' identities and

be part of a community that offered them care and protection. They accepted beliefs regarding women's moral behaviour because from conforming they gained an important source of bonding social capital. Similarly, women who sold sex took on the negative social identity that society gave them.

Women performed techniques such as not going into certain spaces, teaching their daughters about acceptable spaces for girls, not associating with those who carried moral stigma and wearing conservative dress in public spaces. They would often identify these behaviours as a direct response to the reaction that they would receive from people if they did not do so, and not because they believed that this behaviour was necessarily morally correct. My research is full of examples of these coping techniques. A participant said that she thought her daughter was too young to work but she told her to work at home to prevent her from going into dangerous spaces. A group of women told me that they should be allowed to travel in any space and do all types of work but doing so would compromise their status as a 'good woman'. In the same way, women put up with polygamy or domestic violence not because they believed they were right but because the alternative would be more difficult. Women who sold sex avoided mixing with people who would not accept them and tried to hide their stigmatised identity when they were able to.

As discussed previously in the chapter, women exercised their agency in oppressive situations and this often entailed conforming or using techniques to manage positions (Banerjee 2017; Madhok 2013a). In the complexities of the social world, women simultaneously adhere to structures of inequality and utilise their agency (Madhok, Phillips, and Wilson 2013). They made considered decisions for their own protection and wellbeing. For example, participants chose to go out at night but protected themselves through traveling in a group. This reflects research of Lynch (2007) who explored how young working women in Sri Lanka were reshaping their identities as 'good women' through broadening accepted behaviour, while not challenging the central ideology of being a 'good woman' within society. Several participants gave examples of how they made measured choices to protect their status as 'good' women, including restricting where they went and with who they mixed. Conformity did not exclude the presence of agency and coping techniques were a form of exercising agency.

Forms of Resistance

In the first site of research, all the members of the community recognised and responded to the injustice of a young woman allegedly being killed through sharing evidence on their phones, identifying the injustice and mourning together. In many ways, these were classic 'weapons of the weak' as they were faced with more powerful individuals and had few ways to resist more explicitly (Scott 1985). Furthermore, as Scott argued, explicit resistance may well have been futile and counterproductive. This was a class-based, communal resistance that women were part of as one of their multiple identities. When considering women's resistance to gender discrimination, the complexities of women's identities and ideologies regarding gender roles did limit women's decisions to resist (Hart 1991). Even so, there were several examples of women acknowledging the unfairness of society's views of women and men's behaviour towards them, signifying subtle forms of resistance. Furthermore, women tested boundaries by having illicit relationships with colleagues or through technology. Their mobility and visibility had greatly increased through access to work and education, and the social changes that they brought with them.

The women who sold sex were more likely to be involved in more explicit resistance than other groups of participants. While I am not making the claim that this is representative of most women who sold sex in Dhaka, it does relate to a global trend of sex worker's movements (Kabeer, Milward, and Sudarshan 2013), and it is important to understand the mechanisms of resistance used by extremely stigmatised individuals. For example, a participant challenged a policeman's view of her and other women who sold sex through telling him that his violent behaviour towards them was unacceptable. She told the policeman that she and her fellow sex workers worked because they did not have another source of income and it was therefore unfair to blame them. Even though much of her language conformed to preconceived views, addressing the violence she faced, particularly to an authority figure, was a defiant act. Other sex workers campaigned for sex workers' right to live in homes without being evicted. They approached leaders in their area and achieved a safe area for sex workers to live without fear of being evicted. This was a very explicit act of resistance, though peppered with conforming language. Their ability to do so illustrates a skilled ability to bring about change and connect to different forms of social capital. These are two examples of women who were able to use language and narratives that more

powerful men understood in order to challenge their views of women who sold sex and to adjust their behaviour towards them.

The participants were all in disadvantaged positions and to differing degrees endured exploitative experiences. Their decisions were made within restrictive structures, which determined much of their lives. However, oppression does not equal the absence of agency. Women utilised their agency for their benefit and built up their social capital within the spaces that allowed them to. They managed and negotiated their lives skilfully for their wellbeing and the welfare of their children. There were multiple ideologies and belief systems that influenced women's decisions. Women used them as another strategy to manage their lives. Participants were well aware of their disadvantaged position and responded by conforming, engaging in coping strategies and small acts of resistance or engagement in overt resistance activities.

Summary

I found that while there were many overlaps in women's experiences, women in the sex industry faced the extreme levels of exploitation, stigma, and violence, as well as being more likely to participate in resistance movements. References to being 'bad' for sex workers and staying 'good' for other women were common and a central concern for participants. Being 'good' or 'bad' was closely associated with the spaces that women occupied. Restrictions on the spaces that women were allowed to occupy affected all aspects of women's lives and functioned as a method of controlling women's behaviour. They are inextricably linked to views on women's morality, purity and shame. However, women's spaces were being broadened and restrictions were being challenged through the necessity of work and the increase in education. To understand why forms of *purdah* were intact, we must understand the consequences of going against this social norm. Despite experiences of harassment and the potential of being shamed, women were still pushing boundaries and finding ways to be more mobile.

The identities of women who sold sex were defined by the fact that their work took place on the streets. They used various ways of managing and negotiating their stigmatised identities. Women in other forms of employment tried to maintain and manage their identities as a 'good women', which was viewed as an essential part of who they were. Participants were part of structures that were out of their control and there were multiple factors restricting the decisions

that they were able to make. At the same time, they asserted their agency through the daily decisions that they made and the methods that they used to maintain their position in society. While many beliefs regarding gender restrictions were internalised, women were continuously making decisions to promote their interests. All participants skilfully managed their dual experiences of increased agency and social restrictions through utilising resources such as the increase in opportunities for work, education, and changing family structures. However, fundamental beliefs regarding family and morality only saw gradual change. This was largely due to the role that families and communities played in women's lives. It was essential for them to maintain a positive relationship with their communities and families because it was these groups that offered women protection and a sense of belonging.

There were significant and positive forms of social change occurring for women. Women used the resources around them including work, family support, education, NGOs and technology to their advantage. Participants found ways of using these tools and adapting them to their context. They understood the structural and social restraints that they were subject to and negotiated their positions accordingly. A greater depth of understanding regarding the situation of women, motivations for change, and how social situations are managed is essential for policy makers and practitioners in order to consider how to best partner with women to promote positive social changes. Interventions will be ineffective if they do not take into account the importance of respecting women's positions.

Chapter Eight:

Conclusion

Overview of Findings

I began my research because of an interest in women's lives and the changes that I saw occurring in Dhaka. I had witnessed the significant impact of employment opportunities and social changes on women's lives. I was curious about this phenomenon and found that the literature did not answer many of my questions. From my understanding of women's situations and the gaps that I saw in the research, I compiled questions to guide my research. As should be clear throughout my thesis, I have come some way in answering them. To provide an overview of my findings, I will summarise these answers. I begin with the main question.

'How do women who work in low income employment and/ or sell sex in Dhaka construct and negotiate their identities and understand their experiences in the social context of urbanisation and the changing role of women?'

The urban situation brought about two particularly significant changes: altered family structures and employment opportunities for women outside the home. Women no longer lived with their in-laws and lived in close proximity to people who were not their families. Employment allowed them to manage difficult situations and live independently. It was more feasible to live as single mothers, even when officially married, because they did not have to depend on their husband's income. However, women continued to view being a wife and mother as central to their identity. Although their area of mobility had widened, they were concerned with maintaining a 'good' identity. As a result, women modified their behaviour and maintained many aspects of *purdah*. There were a number of participants who for their social status remained married but practically lived out their lives as single women. Women who sold sex managed their stigmatised identities through building their own communities, accessing resources and hiding their stigmatised identity when possible. Marriage and children were also central to many of their experiences. The sub-questions break down these themes further. I provide a summary of the answers to each of these sub-questions.

How do women understand their personal experiences of employment and negotiate their multiple identities?

Participants viewed their employment both as a significant hardship and an opportunity to better their lives. Women described abusive and exploitative elements of their work, but some

participants also expressed pride and enjoyment of their work. Women in general low-income employment identified themselves as part of the geographical communities where they lived. Women in general low-income employment talked about the importance of maintaining a 'good' identity both for their personal moral beliefs and because of the effect that this had on their relationship with others. They viewed their social class as being mistreated by people in more powerful positions. Women who sold sex generally described the work that they did as violent and abusive. However, some participants did have relationships with clients and many formed strong friendships with each other. In some ways participants accepted their stigmatised identities, referring to themselves as 'bad'. However, this was a social identity and did not necessarily reflect how they felt about themselves as individuals. Most described the hardship of living with a stigmatised identity and felt that they were treated unfairly because of it. The next sub-question reflects these views.

What are women's views on the sale of sex?

Women who sold sex defended their right to sell sex but also expressed the view that women do not choose sex work. They described their entrance into sex work as happening when they were raped or tricked into selling sex because these acts spoilt their identity. However, a number of participants expressed the view that sex work was necessary for society and that they provided a service that should be respected. Women recognised the hypocrisy of how they were treated. They were marginalised and abused while the men who used their services faced no consequences. Women who did not sell sex sympathised with this point of view and expressed similar sentiments. However, they viewed interaction with a woman who sold sex as compromising their own identity. Maintaining a 'good' identity was vital for their interactions with their communities as is clear from the answer to the following sub-question.

How do women interact with and how are they perceived by the communities in which they live and work?

Communities were important for both groups of participants. For the first group, the communities that they lived in provided a sense of belonging and protection but also restricted their behaviour. In order to be accepted they had to keep the identity of a 'good' woman. Even so, they pushed boundaries and extended parameters of accepted behaviour. Most of these women earned their income within their geographical community or very close to it. Therefore, their places of work were extensions of these communities. Women who sold sex either hid their identity as sex

workers from their neighbours or lived in an area where community leaders allowed them to live. They talked about not being able to mix with their neighbours who were 'good', which is how they referred to people who did not have a stigmatised identity. They described being kicked out of their homes and suffering abuse from neighbours if their identity was revealed. The participants did not sell sex close to their homes but in prominent public places. They described experiencing abuse and violence from police and clients while they worked. However, they formed their own communities, which offered support and belonging.

How have wider demographic, societal, and cultural changes for urban women affected the situation of women selling sex?

In many ways, wider changes for women had not affected the situation of women who sold sex. They continued to be highly stigmatised and mistreated. However, there were some differences between the urban and rural situation for women selling sex. A number of women were able to hide their identity as women who sold sex in their homes and many more were able to hide their identities from their families in their villages.

The findings of my research shed light on the initial questions raised at the beginning of the study. However, three additional themes, relating to space, agency, and responses to social positions also emerged in the process of the data collection, and each became critical in the resultant analysis. It transpired that women were restricted in their movements and certain spaces had specific connotations. Within these restrictions, women were widening the spaces that they occupied through new work opportunities. Women were clearly utilising their agency in oppressive situations. They recognised that they were in disadvantaged positions and used the resources available to them to respond to their social position. This sometimes involved restricting behaviour to avoid negative responses, whereas at other times women found ways to challenge their positions, and in some situations, women directly resisted their situations. Whichever was the case, women lived within complex social structures, which they found multiple ways to navigate through.

Reflections on my Research

I went into my fieldwork with an understanding of similar groups of people to my research participants through personal and professional experiences as well as reading relevant

literature. However, having a period of time living so closely to these women and actively reflecting on their lives gave me new, often surprising, points of view. For example, I now realise how naïve I was to expect women to volunteer information about selling sex with me without going through an NGO. While I was aware of the stigma associated to these subjects, I did not appreciate the extreme level of this stigma. Being part of a community and invested in it meant that I personally felt embarrassed to bring up taboo subjects. I thus gained a better understanding and appreciation of the effects of stigma. Furthermore, I expected women to be able to hide their stigmatised identities in urban situations more easily, which proved to be wrong. Similarly, I knew that women were moving into new spaces while they continued to have restrictions on their behaviours. However, I was surprised by the complexities of how women lived out this reality and how they managed their situations.

It was often experiences that I had during my research that made me realise just how complex lives and belief systems were. The following situation that occurred during my fieldwork is an example of this. I hated washing in the common bathing area because the room had no door. Although people bathed fully clothed, I felt that it nevertheless compromised my modesty. It puzzled me that women who were generally so concerned about their modesty did not share my sentiments. I woke up at five in the morning to be able to wash while other people were still asleep until I heard a rumour that I did not bathe because no one ever saw me doing so. I explained to a group of my neighbours that I was too embarrassed to wash when other people, particularly men, were around. They said that I was right to be concerned and, after the conversation, a curtain appeared in the doorway to provide privacy. I both felt guilty for causing the community to feel that they had to change their environment for me and relieved that I no longer had to deal with this daily anxiety. This incident made me appreciate the care, generosity and acceptance of the community towards me. It taught me that the urban *bosti* resulted in women being in close contact with men outside their families and this changed the way they related to these men without changing how they would relate to men in other spaces. Like so many areas of life, notions of family and modesty remained intact while being moderated and adjusted. It was often these confusing experiences that best helped me comprehend the complexities of people's lives.

Contribution to Social Science Knowledge

The research in this thesis explores experiences of work, agency, and exploitation in much greater depth than any other research that I am aware of on women in urban low-income employment in Bangladesh. I provide a detailed account of women's lives in a Dhaka *bosti*. I built on Kabeer's work on garments workers to illustrate how women experience coercion and agency simultaneously within these situations. I explored the experiences of women in different forms of urban work including garments, domestic, sex and sari work. Like Banerjee (2017) and Madhok (2013a, 2013b), I found that women are able to make considered choices to carve out parts of their lives for themselves and their children within oppressive structures. Work is used as one of many tools in this process. Women utilise the social capital available to them in order to manage the situations that they find themselves in.

The relationships with members of their communities are vital sources of bonding social capital and these interdependencies are essential to women's decision making and wellbeing. The ethnographic approach to my research allowed me to view the intricacies of the relationship between social capital and wellbeing in the decision-making process of participants. Women made calculated decisions, taking into account the possible loss of social capital and the effect that this would have on their wellbeing. For example, many women chose to be in marriages because they viewed the social capital that they gained from them as essential to their wellbeing. Communities offer social capital, forms of protection and care as well as restrictions and abuse. These communities were central to women's identities.

There is little research that explores women's identities in Bangladesh. My research contributes to how we can understand women's identities in these situations and how it affects their behaviour. I follow an intersectionality approach to understanding the multiple layers of women's identities which included their 'race', their social class, their gender and their relationships with family (Crenshaw 1991). The connotations associated with places have a profound effect on people's identities (Dixon and Durrheim 2000). Living in a *bosti* was central to participants' identities and women's association to the 'streets' was stigmatising. Consequently, women avoided spending time on the streets unnecessarily, and women who sold sex were defined by their relationship to the streets. Holding on to the identity of a 'good' woman was essential for most women, and the identity of a 'bad' woman for sex workers had distinct consequences.

These were social rather than personal identities (Snow and Anderson 1987). Women who sold sex often did not think that they were 'bad' people but identified their community as 'bad' because other communities did not want to associate with them. Similarly, there were plenty of examples of other women pushing boundaries with their morally risky behaviour, but they generally managed these so that they could remain in the broad social identity of being a 'good' woman. For both groups of women, they had to skilfully manage their marginalised positions, utilising their agency.

The discussion on agency and exploitation is essential to understanding the experiences of women who sell sex. I argue that the debate regarding whether sex work/ prostitution should be viewed as any other form of work or as fundamentally oppressive presents a false dichotomy and is largely irrelevant to women's lives. Participants who sold sex discussed both their experiences of exploitation and defended their right to work. They did not only see themselves only as victims or only as workers. They viewed themselves as both. My findings reflect the argument of Patricia Hill Collins (2000) in her discussion on individuals' multiple experiences of oppression. One experience does not exclude another, nor should one side of the dichotomy be privileged over another. I echo Sariola's (2010) argument that this is an elitist debate that is removed from the lives of women. What is meaningful when trying to support and empower women is understanding their particular, nuanced and multifaceted positions. Interventions and policies should be designed to respond to women's experiences and promote their agency rather than concentrating on adhering to a particular ideology. Feminists of the Global North must be particularly aware that their views of women's 'liberation' are too often ethnocentric and 'empowerment' can be realised by women in multiple ways. This argument clearly reflects the important work of Mahmood (2005), which can be applied to many parts of my research, including the sex work/ prostitution debate.

There are few research studies that explore the sale of sex in the broader framework of gendered work. My research placed the sale of sex in the wider context of urban work in Bangladesh and explores its relationship with other forms of work. It illustrated that there were clear overlaps and shared experiences in different forms of work. The distinguishing factor of women who sold sex was the stigmatising social identity that it gave them. This stigma led to the extremely negative consequences that they experienced. Exploitation and violence were

present in most women's experiences of work, but expected and constant for women who sold sex. Because of these extremes, they were more likely to be involved in resistance groups. They did not reject wider beliefs regarding family structures, religion and moral norms, but they found ways of justifying and managing their stigmatised identity within them. Understanding the changes that women desire and how to support them in achieving these is critical to effective social work.

Contribution to Research

There is a growing tradition of ethnography in social work research. My experience of doing ethnographic research reflects arguments that have been made for its particular suitability for social work research. The skills that I needed for ethnographic research were similar to those that I utilised as a social worker (Hoersch, Longhofer, Suskewicz 2014; Archer 2009). Contextualising theory into real life situations is central to social work and intrinsic to ethnography (Hoersch, Longhofer, Suskewicz 2014). Ethnography offers a particularly appropriate tool to assist social workers to engage in culturally sensitive practice (Haight, Kayama, and Korang-Okrah 2013). Furthermore, ethnography can provide embedded knowledge to global debates on issues that are relevant to social work such as global mental health (GMH) policies and interventions (Jain and Orr 2016). My research illustrates how ethnography is able to explore complex phenomena in great detail to inform policy and practice. It is able to cross disciplines, being relevant to social development studies as well as social work. I hope that my research will contribute to this body of literature, confirming the usefulness of ethnography as an appropriate approach to social work research. Ethnography helped gain a nuanced understanding of the women's lives, and having an understanding of these complexities is essential to social work.

Contribution to Policy and Practice

Gaining a better understanding of participants' lives and grappling with the issues that they faced made me consider ways that their needs could be better met. NGOs throughout Bangladesh provide services to women. This thesis could be used to give practitioners running these services and policy makers an in-depth understanding of people's lives. I also hope that these ideas can speak to specific services within the country. Furthermore, there are themes in my

research that are relevant beyond the borders of Bangladesh. Dominelli (2010) argues that social workers need to respond to the social problems that globalization brings:

These include internationalized social problems that bring the global to the local and raise the local to the global arena. They are helped in their tasks through the development of theories, practice and research that can cross borders while still recognizing the significance of local inputs into social problems that have local and/or global dimensions. (609)

Gendered labour, with its relationships to multinational companies, and sex work, with its connections to international movements, are both examples of globalised issues related to my research. While the following discussions are relevant internationally, ideas would need to be adapted to respond appropriately to their context and the wishes of the communities involved.

Social work interventions will always be based on ideologies. It is impossible for them to be neutral. NGOs in Bangladesh promote forms of girls' and women's empowerment based on a rights-based ideology. Those concerned with respecting localised knowledge and culture are often concerned about these 'imported' ideologies. It is important to recognise and respect women's agency to be able to accept, reject and/or adapt ideologies and belief systems. In practice, people do not completely conform to one single ideology but incorporate different ones into their belief systems. This will happen in increasingly complex ways in a globalised and technological world. I found through my research that participants took ideas from NGOs, religious teachers, TV programmes, family practices and community traditions. Ideas were accepted or rejected based on their family, community, personal situations and considered decisions. Services must understand these different ideologies and engage with them in order to effectively impact women's lives.

Sources of income were an important resource for women. However, they were also often exploitative. Social workers need to understand why women fight for these jobs and work alongside them to improve their conditions. In order to best achieve this, social workers must understand the complexities of women's lives, the wider context in which they live and the multiple influences on their decision making. Women are not powerless but have to negotiate their lives within complex social structures. Interventions should take these structures into account and work within them to support women and to widen the areas of their control. Many of the changes that have occurred in the garments industry have been positive, but women

talked about change as happening *to* them rather than something that they were involved *with*. Activists and labour movements were viewed as distant from the lives of these women. Services and policy makers need to find more effective ways of engaging with workers to be able to improve working conditions. This approach must be taken at multiple levels, from the activists of the Global North holding multinational companies to account, to grassroots labour movements that support women to improve their working conditions.

The stigmatised identities of women who sold sex were a principal cause of their exclusion from society and was the root of many of their hardships. When I compare the two groups of participants who sold sex, it is clear that community engagement to promote safe places to live for women who sell sex was key to their wellbeing. Campaigning and community engagement secured housing for this group of women. An NGO project supported the work, but it was led by women who sold sex themselves. Social workers should build on these models of success and continue to develop practical solutions for women to challenge the stigma that they face. I found that women outside of the sex industry were sympathetic to women who sold sex but were concerned for their own identities. Stigma by association was a prominent anxiety for many women. Finding ways to safely engage both groups of women would need to be done sensitively but could potentially lessen the stigma that women who sell sex face and allow them to re-enter spaces from which they have been excluded.

Local knowledge and peer support are important tools in Bangladesh. I witnessed how the participant, Banu, who had originally been hired by an NGO as a peer support worker, built up a community around her that lasted longer than her employment. Research carried out on peer educators for a sex workers' programme found that it was effective in both medical input and emotional support (Sarafian 2012). Peer support workers have been an effective tool for addressing mental health in both the Global North and Global South (Tse et al. 2017). Individuals who have had similar experiences are able to offer hope and support in unique ways as well as access women who would be otherwise difficult to reach. This role is also referred to as peer educators who have been employed for various health related roles with similar outcomes (Naidoo, Morar, and Ramjee 2013; Wade et al. 2017). Interventions involving peer support workers or peer educators could be used for women more generally. Communities acted as an important source of support for participants. Women actively utilised the resources available to

them. However, they seldom knew how to access legal or health services. When someone outside their community like myself suggested using these services, they often did not trust that they could actually help them. Grassroots peer support workers who were part of their community and were aware of these resources could be a powerful tool for women to utilise.

As important as it is to highlight women's agency, it is equally essential to give attention to their experiences of victimisation and violence. It is clear from my research that there are few protections available to women and children. The community of my first research site felt that there could be no justice for the young woman they believed to have been murdered by her husband and in-laws. They appealed to their communities and families for protection rather than to services or legal systems. Women who sold sex frequently talked about the violence that they faced, often from figures of authority. They expected violence to be part of their lives and were more likely to appeal to NGOs. However, the NGOs involved with my participants were unable to provide protection and their interventions did not focus on this area of women's needs. Women told me about their concerns for young girls being sexually exploited in an area where they worked. I looked into ways to support women to address this concern and found no services in the area that would help them. This was partly due to wider failures of the justice system but also the result of services not concentrating on providing protection. Service providers and policy makers must view women as agents and build on their already existing resources and relationships, but they should also recognise their need for the protection that was starkly missing for all my research participants.

NGO's view of 'empowerment' must include women's need for protection and safe spaces. Despite being part of empowerment programmes, women who sold sex continued to face violence, often from the police. The programmes that they were involved in did not challenge political structures or demand services from the government. When interventions did engage with the authorities, it was to convince them not to harm women or to allow women to continue to sell sex. Governments were not expected to provide for the welfare of women. For NGOs this was a practical response; there is little faith in the government to provide security and justice for women. Furthermore, NGOs too often assumed that the status of stigmatised women could not be changed, potentially adding to their stigma. It is important that social workers do not only improve the individual situation of women but also work towards structural changes, fight for

women's safety and create opportunities for them to change the stigmatised identities if they choose to do so.

Limitations of the Study

There were a few areas of my research that I had planned to carry out differently and, if I had been able to do so, would have enhanced my research findings. Firstly, for the second part of my research, I did not live in the same area as my research participants and therefore my understanding of the lives of women who sold sex has less depth than for the first group of participants. However, I applied the knowledge that I had gained from the first part of the research, living in similar housing and areas, to increase my understanding of the second group of participants. Another significant difference from my original plans was that like other research on the subject of sex work, I was only able to access women who sold sex who had links to NGOs. This resulted in a limited understanding of women who sell sex. Participants had a view of sex work that was promoted by NGOs and I was unable to learn how or whether women could completely hide their identities.

Implications for Further Research

My findings raise questions and could be built upon in further research. There are a that I consider particularly prominent because they could be means to effect social change.

Arguably, most forms of work that featured in my research, including domestic and sari work, had elements of exploitation and offered lower levels of pay than garments work. However, because of the international links and the enormous profits that multinational companies make, international activists have focused on garments work. Similarly, due to international concern sparked by the HIV and AIDS epidemic, sex workers have had comparatively more attention and access to services than women in other forms of work. Further research on these international companies and movements would advance studies of both post-colonial theory and critical theory. However, this also leads me to the questions: How are labour rights being fought for in other areas of work? How could they be addressed? For example, who decides how much women who work on saris in their homes should be paid and how could these forms of work be made more secure? The sari work undertaken by my research participants was similar in many ways to Mies' (1982) descriptions of home-based work in India. She argued that

because of its informal nature, this type of work was not liberating for women but instead simply an extension of the existing patriarchal system. However, my participants often chose this form of work over others because of the flexibility that it gave them. Sex workers movements prove that informal workers can mobilise and fight for their rights (Kabeer, Milward, and Sudarshan 2013). Further research on these forms of work and appropriate responses for improving conditions has the potential of improving the lives of thousands of women in Bangladesh.

There has been a lot of work in Bangladesh that has focused on women's empowerment. However, this work will be limited in its success if the wider community, including men, are not included. Women cannot be expected to transform their situations by simply changing their behaviour. There needs to be wider changes to how communities function and to broader structures. Further research is necessary on a more holistic, community-based approach to the promotion of gender equality. I was at an event that a participant invited me to that particularly highlighted this point for me. Sex workers performed a drama about sexual violence that women face. The audience was largely male and in the discussion that followed the drama most of these men's responses were to blame the women involved: they should have dressed or acted differently. In many ways I was unsurprised by these comments. Women all over the world, including my research participants, modify their behaviour to avoid violence. However, it made me consider how little we know about what brings about changes to men's behaviour in Bangladesh and how little emphasis there is on addressing oppressive male behaviour. To bring about change for women, negative notions of masculinity in Bangladesh need to be challenged.

The emphasis on a woman becoming 'empowered' can be individualistic and too often ignores their complex social relationships. An important research study found that intimate partner violence initially increased in Bangladesh with the widespread introduction of women's empowerment programmes as a reaction against changes in behaviours but subsequently decreased in recent years as some of these behaviours became normalised (Schuler et al. 2018). The male participants of this research complained about some changes in women's behaviour and that services concentrated on women, but they viewed the increased economic and education status of their wives as positive. This research and aspects of my own illustrate that there have been encouraging changes to men's attitude towards women. However, the levels of violence that women face is still extremely high, and their status is far from equal to

men's. Communities and families were central to participants' experiences and decision-making processes. We need to know more about how there can be more holistic approaches to the empowerment of women, that are led by women but include the whole community. A theory of change would assist in understanding how practitioners can partner with communities to bring about these changes.

Closing Remarks

Too often women in the sex industry, garments workers or 'poor' women in general are portrayed as one-dimensional. I hope that the 'thick' descriptions of my research have reflected the complexities of women's lives and the ways that they manage them. Women's lives were changing, bringing about both significant challenges and opportunities. Oppressive structures and hardships should not be ignored. Neither should women's strengths and ingenuity. Social work has to respond to all aspects of women's lives and not shy away from the dense webs of relationships, ideologies, and experiences that they are part of. This research is an attempt to portray the richness of the lives of women who were so generous towards me with their time and stories.

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Appendix 1: Approved Ethics Review Form

University of Edinburgh

School of Social and Political Studies

RESEARCH AND RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Ethical review form for level 2 and level 3 auditing



This form should be used for any research projects carried out under the auspices of SSPS that have been identified by self-audit as requiring detailed assessment - i.e. level 2 and level 3 projects (see <http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/research/ethics>). This form provides general School-wide provisions. Proposers should feel free to supplement these with detailed provisions that may be stipulated by research collaborators (e.g. NHS) or professional bodies (e.g. BSA, SRA). The signed and completed form should be submitted, along with a copy of the research proposal (or a description of the research goals and methodology where this is unavailable) to the relevant person:

- For staff applying for external funding, the PI should submit the form to Research Office
- For Postdoctoral Fellows, the Mentor should submit the form to Research Office
- For PG Research (PhD or MSc by Research), the Supervisor should submit the form to Director of the Graduate School.
- For UG Dissertations, the Supervisor should submit the form to the Programme/Dissertation Convenor.

Research and Research Ethics Committee will monitor level 2 proposals to satisfy themselves that the School Ethics Policy and Procedures are being complied with. They will revert to proposers in cases where there may be particular concerns or queries. For level 3 audits, work should not proceed until Research and Research Ethics Committee (or the Director of Graduate Studies, in the case of postdoctoral research) has considered the issues raised. Level 3 applications should be submitted well in advance of a required date of approval.

Research Office may monitor the implementation of arrangements for dealing with ethical issues through the lifetime of research projects. Please ensure you keep a record of how you are addressing ethics issues in the course of your research (e.g. consent forms, disclosure processes, storage of data, discussion of ethical issues by project advisory board). Do contact the Research Administrator if any unanticipated ethics issues arise in the course of your research/after the completion of your project.

SECTION 1: PROJECT DETAILS

1.1 Title of Project **Selling Sex and Other Low-income Employment in Dhaka: Exploring Women's Experiences**

1.2 Principal Investigator, and any Co-Investigator(s) (Please provide details of Name, Institution, Email and Telephone) **Bethany Jennings, University of Edinburgh, s1357388@sms.ed.ac.uk, 07443568358**

1.4 Does the sponsor require formal prior ethical review? YES NO X
If yes, by what date is a response required

1.5 Does the project require the approval of any other institution and/or ethics committee?
YES NO ☒ X

If YES, give details and indicate the status of the application at each other institution or ethics committee (i.e. submitted, approved, deferred, rejected).

1.6 This project has been assessed using this checklist and is judged to be
LEVEL2 (for information to Research Ethics Committee) ☒ The assumption, in discussion with
PhD supervisors, is that this will be Level 2.

LEVEL 3 ☐ (for discussion by Research Ethics Committee)

1.7 If Level 3, is there a date by which a response from the committee is required?

Name..... Signature.....

PLEASE ATTACH A COPY OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL (OR ALTERNATIVELY A
DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH)

SECTION 2: POTENTIAL RISKS TO PARTICIPANTS

2.1 Is it likely that the research will induce any psychological stress or discomfort?

YES ☒ X NO

If YES, state the nature of the risk and what measures will be taken to deal with such problems.

The research explores a sensitive topic and it is possible that issues discussed such as working conditions, engagement in sex work, personal situations and life experiences may cause discomfort or stress. However, I will only begin interviews and broach these subjects once I have built up a relationship with research participants and will, therefore, have a better understanding of when to stop interviews if situations become detrimental to participants well-being. Additionally, I would have spent at least three months living in their community and will have an understanding of their support networks. I will make it clear that participants can withdraw from the research at any time.

The focus of my research is selling sex within the context of other low income employment; I will therefore be interviewing women who sell sex informally, rather than through a pimping or brothel arrangement. I will identify myself as a researcher interested in women and work, rather than sex work per se. Not only will this be clearer in terms of my own research agenda but it will limit the potential of my research stigmatising women. If I do decide that it is necessary to interview women who identify themselves as sex workers, I will do this through a local NGO with whom the women already have contact and the NGO staff will be able to advise me on the most sensitive way to interview women.

2.2 Does the research require any physically invasive or potentially physically harmful procedures? YES ☐ NO ☒ X

If YES, give details and outline procedures to be put in place to deal with potential problems.

- 2.3 Does the research involve sensitive topics, such as participants' sexual behaviour, illegal activities, their experience of violence, their abuse or exploitation, their mental health, or their ethnic status?

YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES, give details.

The research will explore women's experiences of selling sex as well as other low income employment in which they may have had experiences of violence, exploitation and/ or abuse.

- 2.4 Is it likely that this research will lead to the disclosure of information about child abuse or neglect or other information that would require the researchers to breach confidentiality conditions agreed with participants?

YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES, indicate the likelihood of such disclosure and your proposed response to this.

If there is a real risk of such disclosure triggering an obligation to make a report to Police, Social Work or other authorities, a warning to this effect must be included in the Information and Consent documents.

It is possible that during my time spent engaging in ethnographic research and during interviews concerns might be raised. I will be conducting my research in Bangladesh which does not have statutory child protection systems in place and where corruption in the police system can mean their involvement causes more harm than protection. However, I am aware of legal organisations that I can contact for advice and who could take appropriate steps to address issues that arise. If there is a disclosure, I would talk to the participant about my concerns and planned response if appropriate.

- 2.5 Is it likely that the research findings could be used in a way that would adversely affect participants or particular groups of people?

YES ☐

NO ☒

If YES, describe the potential risk for participants of this use of the data. Outline any steps that will be taken to protect participants.

- 2.6 Is it likely that participation in this research could adversely affect participants in any other way?

YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, give details and outline procedures to be put in place to deal with such problems.

- 2.7 Is this research expected to benefit the participants, directly or indirectly?

YES ☒

NO ☐

If YES, give details.

I hope that participants will find being part of the research process and being able to tell their stories a positive experience. If giving time to me takes away from their earnings, I am likely to give a small payment. I hope that the findings of my research will lead to a better understanding of women's experiences, and therefore positively input into services and policies that affect them.

2.8 Will the true purpose of the research be concealed from the participants?

YES ☐

NO ☒

If YES, explain what information will be concealed and why. Will participants be debriefed at the conclusion of the study? If not, why not?

SECTION 3: POTENTIAL RISKS TO THE RESEARCHER/S

3.1 Is the research likely to involve any psychological or physical risks to the researcher, and/or research assistants), including those recruited locally?

YES ☒ NO ☐

If Yes, explain what measures will be taken to ensure adequate protection/support.

The research topic is a sensitive one and could potentially be upsetting. It could be difficult for myself, the researcher, to process the distressing experiences that are likely to be told to me. Furthermore, I plan to live in an urban slum for between 6 to 10 months which could be challenging conditions to live in. However, I have lived in Bangladesh for a significant part of my life and know the area that I will be living in. I have a supportive network of family and friends living in Dhaka and plan to spend two nights a week living with family outside the slum. I will have a Dhaka based academic providing supervision while in the field and will have monthly supervision with my supervisors in Edinburgh through skype. I will make sure that all my immunisations are up to date before leaving for the field.

SECTION 4: PARTICIPANTS

4.1 How many participants is it hoped to include in the research?

There are two parts of my research. The initial stage will be conducting ethnographic participant observation by living in a slum area of Dhaka that has a high number of women in low income employment. The population of the slum is roughly 300 people. During this time I will be interacting with lots of different groups of people who are part of this community. I will also be building up relationships with women who I will later interview. Between 30 and 50 women will be interviewed either individually or as part of a group.

4.2 What criteria will be used in deciding on the inclusion and exclusion of participants in the study?

I will be interviewing women in low income employment in Dhaka, this will include women who sell sex, garments workers, casual labourers, and domestic workers. I will include women who identify themselves as working in these forms of employment.

4.3 Are any of the participants likely to:

be under 18 years of age?

YES ☒

NO ☐

be looked after children (including those living in local authority care or those living at home with a legal supervision requirement)?

YES ☐

NO ☒

be physically or mentally ill?

YES ☒

NO ☐

have a disability?

YES ☒

NO ☐

be members of a vulnerable or stigmatized minority?

YES ☒

NO ☐

be unlikely to be proficient in English?

YES ☒

NO ☐

be in a client or professional relationship with the researchers?

YES ☐

NO ☒

be in a student-teacher relationship with the researchers?

YES ☐

NO ☒

be in any other dependent relationship with the researchers?

YES ☐

NO ☒

have difficulty in reading and/or comprehending any printed material distributed as part of the research process?

YES ☒

NO ☐

be vulnerable in other ways?

YES ☒

NO ☐

If YES to any of the above, explain and describe the measures that will be used to protect and/or inform participants.

I will be spending time with participants over a long period of time and will therefore build up relationships with them. Through establishing these relationships I will be able to ensure that participants understand the research that I am doing and are consenting to be part of it. If any emotional distress is

caused during interviews I will end them appropriately and seek support for the participant. I speak the language of the participants, Bengali, and their not being able to speak English will therefore not be a problem.

Do the researchers need to be cleared through the Disclosure (Protecting Vulnerable Groups) Scheme? See http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk/pvg/pvg_index.html

YES ☐ NO ☒

Will it be difficult to ascertain whether participants are vulnerable in any of the ways listed above (e.g. where participants are recruited via the internet)?

YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES, what measures will be used to verify the identity of participants, or protect vulnerable participants?

I will not seek out participants who are children, who have disabilities or who are mentally or physically ill. However, living part a community will inevitably result in having contact with these groups. Furthermore, there may be participants who have undiagnosed illnesses and I do not want to exclude individuals based on an illness or disability. In all the relationships I have with participants I will seek to be sensitive to their needs and not engage them in the research if they do not have an appropriate level of understanding of it. Similarly, childhood in the Bangladeshi context is quite different from the UK. I may well have participants who are considered and acting as adults in the Bangladeshi culture (e.g. they are married or working to support their family) but are under eighteen years old. Having spent time with them, I will have gaged their maturity level and whether they are able to provide informed consent to be part of the research.

4.4 How will the sample be recruited?

I will be living in an area of Dhaka city that I have a connection. Through getting to know people in this community I will begin to identity relevant women to interview and will then use a snow balling method to recruit participants.

4.5 Will participants receive any financial or other material benefits because of participation?

YES ☒

NO ☐

If YES, what benefits will be offered to participants and why?

It is the norm in Bangladesh for payments to be given for people's time. This may be small amounts of money, other gifts or assistance in some way. It will be best for me to decide what is most appropriate in dialogue with the community once the research has begun.

Before completing Sections 5 & 6 please refer to the University Data Protection Policy to ensure that the relevant conditions relating to the processing of personal data under

Schedule 2 and Schedule 3 are satisfied. Details are Available at:

www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk

SECTION 5: CONFIDENTIALITY AND HANDLING OF DATA

- 5.1 Will the research require the collection of personal information from e.g. universities, schools, employers, or other agencies about individuals without their direct consent?

YES ☐

NO ☒

If YES, state what information will be sought and why written consent for access to this information will not be obtained from the participants themselves.

- 5.2 Does the research involve the collection of sensitive data (including visual images of respondents) through the internet?

YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, describe measures taken to ensure written consent for access to this information.

- 5.3 Will any part of the research involving participants be audio/film/video taped or recorded using any other electronic medium?

YES ☒

NO ☐

If YES, what medium is to be used and how will the recordings be used?

I will record interviews using an audio recording device. I will take pictures of the area that I will be researching and will ask for consent to take these pictures. I will make sure that faces are unidentifiable when using the pictures.

- 5.4 Who will have access to the raw data?

Myself and a transcriber. I will anonymise the recordings before having them transcribed. I will ensure that the transcriber does not know or have any connections to the area where the research is being completed.

- 5.5 Will participants be identifiable, including through internet searches?

YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, how will their consent to quotations/identifications be sought?

- 5.6 If not, how will anonymity be preserved?

- 5.7 Will the datafiles/audio/video tapes, etc. be disposed of after the study?

YES ☒

NO ☐

- 5.8 How long they will be retained? **five years**
- 5.9 How will they eventually be disposed of? **Shredded**
- 5.10 How do you intend for the results of the research to be used?

The data will be used for writing my PhD thesis, articles, seminars and conference presentations. Through articles and meetings with service providers and policy makers I hope that the research will be used to inform these areas.

- 5.11 Will feedback of findings be given to participants?

YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES, how and when will this feedback be provided?

I plan for this to be a continuous process throughout the research through focus groups and ongoing discussions with participants. I will get a shortened version of the findings translated into Bengali to share with those interested.

SECTION 6: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT

- 6.1 Will written consent be obtained from participants?

YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, attach a copy of the information sheet and consent forms.

In some contexts of ethnographic research, written consent may not be obtainable or may not be meaningful. If written consent will NOT be obtained, please explain why circumstances make obtaining consent problematic.

Many of the participants will not be able to read a written consent form and I believe that a consent form will cause undue suspicion and alarm. It will be much more meaningful to explain the research verbally over a period of time. I will ask for verbal consent at the beginning of each interview and make sure that this interaction is recorded.

Administrative consent may be deemed sufficient:

- a) for studies where the data collection involves aggregated (not individual) statistical information and where the collection of data presents:
 - (i) no invasion of privacy;
 - (ii) no potential social or emotional risks:
- b) for studies which focus on the development and evaluation of curriculum materials, resources, guidelines, test items, or programme evaluations rather than the study, observation, and evaluation of individuals.

6.2 Will administrative consent be obtained in lieu of participants' consent?

YES NO ☒

If YES, explain why individual consent is not considered necessary.

In the case of research in online spaces or using online technology to access participants, will consent be obtained from participants?

If YES, explain how this consent will be obtained.

If NO, give reasons.

6.3 In the case of children under 16 participating in the research on an individual basis, will the consent or assent of parents be obtained?

YES ☒ NO

If YES, explain how this consent or assent will be obtained.

If there are cases when a girl under 16 years old is taking part and parents are present, I will ask them if they have any objections to their daughter taking part in the research.

If NO, give reasons.

6.4 Will the consent or assent (at least verbal) of children under 16 participating in the research on an individual basis be obtained?

YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES, explain how this consent or assent will be obtained.

It is unlikely that there will be many girls under 16 years old participating but if there are I will gain their consent in the same way as other participants. As explained above, they would be taking part if they were acting in a way that culturally makes them considered to be adults.

If NO, give reasons.

6.5 In the case of participants whose first language is not English, will arrangements be made to ensure informed consent?

Yes ☒ NO ☐

If YES, what arrangements will be made?

I speak the language spoken by the participants.

If NO, give reasons.

6.6 In the case of participants with disabilities (e.g. learning difficulties or mental health problems), will arrangements be made to ensure informed consent?

YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES, what arrangements will be made?

See 4.3

If NO, give reasons.

- 6.7 Many funders encourage making datasets available for use by other researchers. Will the data collected in this research be made available for secondary use?

YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES, what arrangements are in place to ensure the consent of participants to secondary use?

I will explain to participants that there interviews will be used over a period of time, by others as well as myself and in various ways.

SECTION 7: Unplanned/unforeseen problems

- 7.1 Is the research likely to encounter any significant ethical risks that cannot be planned for at this stage?

YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, please indicate what arrangements are being made to address these as they arise in the course of the project.

SECTION 8: CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The University has a 'Policy on the Conflict of Interest', which states that a conflict of interest would arise in cases where an employee of the University might be "compromising research objectivity or independence in return for financial or non-financial benefit for him/herself or for a relative or friend." See:

http://www.docs.csg.ed.ac.uk/HumanResources/Policy/Conflict_of_Interest.pdf

Conflict of interest may also include cases where the source of funding raises ethical issues, either because of concerns about the moral standing or activities of the funder, or concerns about the funder's motivation for commissioning the research and the uses to which the research might be put.

The University policy states that the responsibility for avoiding a conflict of interest, in the first instance, lies with the individual, but that potential conflicts of interest should always be disclosed, normally to the line manager or Head of Department. Failure to disclose a conflict of interest or to cease involvement until the conflict has been resolved may result in disciplinary action and in serious cases could result in dismissal.

- 8.1 Does your research involve a conflict of interest as outlined above

YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, give details.